

MAX STIRNER'S  
DIALECTICAL  
EGOISM

A NEW INTERPRETATION

JOHN F. WELSH

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To Wendy Welsh . . .

A blithe spirit who manages to amuse,  
inspire, educate, and tolerate me on a daily basis.



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I

MAX STIRNER AND  
DIALECTICAL EGOISM



# 1



## Max Stirner: “The Peaceful Enemy of All Constraint”

### A DIALECTICAL EGOIST EXAMINES MODERNITY

Many of the scholars and writers who studied the writings of Max Stirner expressed ambivalent reactions to the philosophy of the author of *The Ego and Its Own*.<sup>1</sup> True, Stirner’s influence on individualist anarchism has been described by intellectual historians. It is also true that Stirner had more than a perceptible influence on the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Lőrinc Szabó. Stirner was one of the philosophic sources that shaped the novels of B. Traven and Ernst Jünger, the dramas of Henrik Ibsen, and the art of Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst. And, there is considerable suspicion that Stirner may have influenced Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche.

However, philosophers and critics as diverse as Georg Simmel, George Santayana, Herbert Read, Martin Buber, Albert Camus, and Karl Löwith criticized Stirner’s work in extremely harsh terms, even as they praised its basic observation that modern society promotes the dissolution of the individual in favor of collectivist constructions. These scholars were simultaneously attracted to Stirner’s uncompromising individualism, but repulsed by its forceful presentation and what they considered to be its harsh and lonely implications. Despite the criticisms, many of them believed that *The Ego and Its Own* has been grossly underappreciated since its original publication in 1844.<sup>2</sup>

Stirner’s extraordinary masterpiece has been called the “most revolutionary book ever written,” foreshadowing important philosophic trends that emerged in the nineteenth century, including individualist anar-

chism, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and postmodernism. In many important ways, Stirner intellectually demolished both the right and left-wing interpretations of Hegel's thought, as well as the philosophic foundations of liberalism. He also offered a radical alternative to socialism and communism. Stirner's dialectical egoist critique is not usually part of the polite discourse of academia and mainstream culture in the early part of the twenty-first century. However, interest in it never seems to disappear, as evident in occasional scholarly musings about the philosophic origins of postmodernist, radical, and critical thought today. In addition, there are determined efforts by individualists in many countries to promote Stirner's form of egoism.<sup>3</sup> Stirner's thought has enjoyed several brief revivals in culture, politics, and scholarship since it originally rocked the political and cultural elites in Berlin in the 1840s. Indeed, it is like the proverbial "bad penny" that keeps reappearing, annoyingly, at inopportune times. Thinkers like Santayana and Buber could not seem to either accept or completely expunge the argument of *The Ego and Its Own* from their analyses and critiques of modern thought and popular culture. Herbert Read articulated the dilemma most graphically by stating that an encounter with Stirner "sticks in the gizzard."<sup>4</sup> Max Stirner left an interesting and ambiguous legacy in the history of ideas.

Even Friedrich Engels, one of Stirner's best-known critics, expressed considerable ambivalence toward Stirner's egoist thought. Engels, of course, was coauthor with Karl Marx of *The German Ideology*, arguably the most virulent and hateful attack on Stirner and *The Ego and Its Own*. Engels did not always express the antipathy toward Stirner that appears in *The German Ideology*. Soon after *The Ego and Its Own* was published in 1844, Engels wrote to his friend Marx that "the noble Stirner" was "the most talented, independent and hard-working of 'The Free,'" the group of radical journalists and Young Hegelian philosophers who were early associates of Marx and Engels in Berlin in the 1840s. While far from endorsing the egoism and interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic that appears in Stirner's work, Engels suggested to Marx that Stirner's radical individualist concept should become the "true basis" and "point of departure" for the materialist conception of history and society they were developing. Marx, as it turned out, had other ideas.<sup>5</sup>

Who was "Max Stirner"? Why did he generate such strong and contradictory reactions? What did he contribute to social and political theory? Did he significantly influence other social and political theorists? What are the important theoretical problems in his writings? What relevance, if any, does he have today?

Much of contemporary social and political theory is concerned with the concept of "modernity," including (a) its structural and cultural characteristics, (b) the social and historical dynamics that created it, and (c) how it

frustrates individual freedom and self-fulfillment. Critics of modernity are also interested in the prospects for its transformation into a new and qualitatively different sociohistorical formation. *Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism: A New Interpretation* is based on the idea that Max Stirner must be understood first and foremost as a *critic of modernity*. Stirner had a keen sense of the historical transformation of the ancient world into the modern, as well as the dynamics adumbrating the end of modernity. Stirner, the student of Hegel, founded the philosophy presented in *The Ego and Its Own* on a sharp distinction between antiquity and modernity. He focused his magnum opus on an assessment and critique of the theories that emerged in the early 1800s in Europe that claimed to offer an epistemological, cultural, and political break with both antiquity and modernity. In opposition to the Hegelians, liberals, socialists, communists, and humanists of his time, Stirner developed a *dialectical egoist* critique of the politics and economics, the culture and ideology, and the self-other relationship in the modern world. Stirner was one of the earliest and most insightful critics of mass democracy, liberalism, socialism, communism, humanism, and scientism. In each case, he was primarily concerned with uncovering the collectivist and statist dimensions of the political and philosophic alternatives that emerged in the 1800s.

Stirner's writings had a direct influence on a diverse group of thinkers who applied his dialectical egoist concepts to a critique of modernity, but also developed aspects of his thought in new and unexpected directions. This book explores the extent to which the writings of Max Stirner and his intellectual progeny constitute a coherent critique of modernity that can be called *dialectical egoism*. An important aspect of this discussion is to differentiate Stirner's thought from that of one of the most important individualist or egoist thinkers of the last century and a half, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was also an individualist critic of modernity, but was probably not significantly influenced by Stirner, espousing only superficial similarities with Stirner's dialectical egoism.

The first purpose of this book is to demonstrate that Max Stirner was a theorist of modernity, and to examine his contributions to the study of modernity which are rooted in his unique concept of egoism. The second purpose of the book is to demonstrate that Stirner was not only a student of Hegel, but that he was a thoroughgoing dialectical thinker and should be located squarely in that philosophic tradition. Thus, the book examines Stirner's unique contributions to dialectical thought. Third, the book demonstrates that Stirner had a significant and singular impact on an array of egoist writers and activists in the nineteenth and twentieth century, that differs significantly from the work of Nietzsche. Stirner's concept of modernity and his stature as a dialectical thinker are demonstrated through a discussion of *The Ego and Its Own* and the ideas of other thinkers he influ-



enced. The book concludes with a discussion that organizes the thoughts of Stirner and his intellectual progeny into a theoretical framework that includes the levels of analysis, the types of critique, and basic methodological concepts that constitute a dialectical egoist critique of modernity.

## BECOMING MAX STIRNER

Most of what is known about the person who became “Max Stirner” was discovered and collected in the late nineteenth century by his biographer, the Scottish-German novelist, poet, and anarchist writer John Henry Mackay.<sup>6</sup> Mackay laments in his biography that very little is known about Max Stirner. Mackay regrets that he was able to gather only the “bare facts” about Stirner’s life, especially before the publication of *The Ego and Its Own*. Mackay reports that many of his efforts to uncover the facts about Stirner’s life, beyond the “mere statistics” and “dead numbers,” were frustrated by the absence of pertinent documents and lack of cooperation from certain principals, specifically, Stirner’s second wife Marie Dähnhardt.

“Max Stirner” was actually the pen name, or the nom de guerre, of a German schoolteacher named Johann Caspar Schmidt. Schmidt acquired the nickname “Stirner” as student because of his high forehead, which was accentuated by the manner in which he parted his hair. “Max Stirner” was a humorous, but affectionate moniker because it translates into “Max the Highbrow.” Schmidt was born in the Bavarian town of Bayreuth on November 6, 1806, to Albert Christian Heinrich Schmidt, a flute maker and part-time portrait painter, and Sophia Eleonora Schmidt. 1806 was a year of considerable social disorganization in Bayreuth and the entirety of West Prussia because of the Napoleonic Wars. 1806 was the last year of Prussian rule, which was replaced by the domination of Napoleon. Schmidt’s parents were likely married in 1805 and had no other children. In April 1807, barely six months after Johann Caspar’s birth, Albert Schmidt died of an apparent hemorrhage caused by some sort of physical injury. In 1809, Sophia Eleonora married Heinrich Ballerstedt and moved without young Johann Caspar to Kulm in West Prussia. Johann Caspar stayed behind with his godparents—his aunt Anna Marie Sticht and her husband Johann Caspar Martin Sticht in Bayreuth. This was the first of several major moves that suggest considerable familial instability in Johann’s early years.

Ballerstedt was an apothecary who either purchased or rented a pharmacy in Kulm. Johann eventually joined his mother and her new husband in 1810. Eight years later, Johann returned to Bayreuth to live with the Stichts. This transition was apparently prompted by his mother’s increasing psychological problems as well as the political unrest and economic hard-

ships in Prussia at that time. However, Johann was warmly received back in the Stichts' home. He entered the gymnasium in Bayreuth in 1819 and, by the account provided by Mackay, appears to have been a good, but not stellar, student. He graduated from the gymnasium in September 1826. As Stirner reaches this important benchmark in his life, Mackay asks,

What kind of person was this boy? How did his first inclination appear? How did his first drives in life express themselves? Where did they find nourishment and what was it? Did he enjoy the years of his youth in untroubled joy and strength? Or were they already made melancholy by the shadows of some kind of conflict?

Mackay indicates that questions like these cannot be answered by either available information or "external data" about Schmidt. Schmidt's early years remain a "hidden life" in that little or nothing is known about his personal experiences or his personality. This begins to change as he leaves for university study in Berlin, where he lived most of the rest of his life. Berlin was the city in which he flourished as a student, writer, and intellectual.

Schmidt left Bayreuth in October 1826 to begin his studies in philosophy at the University of Berlin. He was joined that term by another new student who became his greatest philosophic adversary and one of the two sources of inspiration for *The Ego and Its Own*: Ludwig Feuerbach. The other source of inspiration was G. W. F. Hegel, professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin and, with little doubt, the most influential philosopher in Germany at the time. Schmidt began taking courses with Hegel in his second semester. His initial course with Hegel was the "Philosophy of Religion." This was followed the next year with courses taught by Hegel in the "History of Philosophy and Psychology" and "Anthropology, or Philosophy of the Spirit."

Schmidt's studies in philosophy at Berlin were interrupted from 1828 to 1832 most likely because of "domestic circumstances" associated with his mother's illness. He returned to West Prussia, enrolling at universities in Erlangen and Königsberg. Mackay reports, however, that Schmidt attended lectures only sporadically and did not apply for a completion certificate. It appears that Schmidt continued his philosophical and philological studies on his own. He returned to Berlin in October 1832 and enrolled in the University for the second time. He took courses in art, the mythology of the ancient Germans, the history of literature, and the history of Prussia. He withdrew from the University once again in the spring of 1834 and applied with the Royal Scientific Examination Commission to take the exam *pro facultate docendi*, in the hope of obtaining a teaching position at a public institution. He submitted his written exam materials in November of 1834 and took his oral examinations in the spring of 1835.

As Mackay documents, Schmidt passed the exam and was granted a *qualified facultas docendi*. Although “none of the examiners had any doubt about his unusual talent,” this was not “a splendid result.” Regardless, Schmidt became qualified to teach.

From April 1835 to November 1836, Schmidt obtained an unpaid position teaching Latin at the Royal Realschule in Berlin. It eventually became obvious that he was unlikely to obtain a teaching position at either a state university or gymnasium because of his mediocre academic performance and his evolving reputation for atheism and egoism. As a consequence, he abandoned public education as a career path. Living off of small inheritances he received after the death of his stepfather and his godfather, Stirner married Agnes Clara Kunigunde Burtz, the daughter of his landlady, in December 1837. Mackay characterizes the marriage as “quiet, harmless, and dispassionate.” Unfortunately, Agnes Clara and her premature baby died in childbirth on August 29, 1838. Soon thereafter, Schmidt resumed his former life as a withdrawn independent scholar. In October of 1839, he obtained a salaried position at a well-regarded and well-funded private school for “young ladies” from upper-class families. The school was owned and administered by a Madame Gropius. It focused on languages, literature, and the humanities. Schmidt taught courses in German, the history of literature, and European history. He taught at Madame Gropius’ school for young ladies until unexpectedly, at least to his employer, resigning in October 1844.

Schmidt’s resignation from Madame Gropius’ school was prompted not by any particular dissatisfaction with his employment, but by two important, somewhat veiled, transitions that occurred in his life from 1842 to 1844. Schmidt became a serious writer and a participant in an informal group of radical intellectuals who were attempting, both individually and collectively, to articulate a philosophic foundation for revolutionary change in Germany and throughout Europe. Through his writings and the political discussions with other radicals from 1842 to 1844, Johann Caspar Schmidt transformed himself into Max Stirner. It is only at this point in his life that information about his personality and inner experiences becomes available.

In the early 1840s, a disparate group of young men began to meet informally almost every evening in a wine bar called “Hippel’s” on the Friedrichstrasse close to the University in Berlin. Very little unified this group of journalists, teachers, artists, poets, musicians, and activists, but they all were very critical of the political and economic circumstances of Germany at the time and, to a greater or lesser degree, they were all fighting against them publicly. The group included atheists, radical democrats, socialists, and communists. Moreover, members of the group considered themselves to be critics of the Hegelianism that still dominated the uni-

versities and public discourse. This group, which was considered to be the "extreme left" of Germany at the time, was known as *Die Freien*, or "The Free." The group of "young" or "new" Hegelians acquired considerable notoriety in the 1840s because of the philosophic positions and political activities of several of its members. In addition to drinking the spirits sold at Hippel's, "The Free" engaged in raucous discussions about the prospects for the rise of a post-Hegelian philosophy as well as a revolutionary transformation of Germany and Europe.

The participants in the discussions at Hippel's reads like a "who's who" of the German left in middle of the nineteenth century. Karl Marx joined the discussions in 1840 prior to his departure from Berlin in early 1841. Friedrich Engels, who had not yet met Marx, also participated beginning in 1842. The radical journalist Arnold Ruge was a frequent participant in the discussions during this time, as were the theologians Bruno and Edgar Bauer. The Bauers acquired some infamy in the 1840s because of their atheistic interpretation of Hegelianism and their occasional encounters with law enforcement. Bruno Bauer, also a student of Hegel, was especially notorious, having been fired from his position as professor of theology at the University of Bonn for his criticism of religion and efforts to create an incipient form of humanism, or a human-based philosophy of nature, society, and individuality. Bruno and Edgar Bauer became and remained close friends of Stirner.

Stirner began attending the discussions at Hippel's probably in mid- to late 1841. He became good friends with the inner circle of "The Free," including Engels. Evidence regarding Stirner's participation in the discussions at Hippel's provides some information about the type of person he was. Stirner typically kept a low profile and only rarely engaged in passionate discussions. Reportedly, he never became cynical or sarcastic, never tried to interrupt or outdo other speakers. Atypical for the discussions of "The Free," Stirner was never vulgar, raw, or even particularly vehement. He apparently philosophized unwillingly. When he did, it was usually about Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*.<sup>8</sup> However, he was not taciturn, but would engage in conversation gladly. He easily demonstrated to others that he was a first rate scholar who mastered the diverse fields addressed in the conversation at Hippel's. Stirner almost never spoke about himself. Consequently, he was viewed as a calm, smiling, comfortable, painfully modest man who occasionally contributed a pertinent observation or witticism to the rambunctious dialogue at Hippel's. His friend Edgar Bauer reported that Stirner was an "amiable and unobtrusive person, never offensive nor striving after brilliant effects in either phrase, conduct, or appearance." Bauer also said that his general impression of Stirner was that he was an intelligent but unimpressive good person, agreeable, cool, and never spoke badly about anyone behind their

back. His attitude toward others and the world was “easy indifference” and a lack of ambition.<sup>9</sup>

Engels also provided some recollections of the *dramatis personae* among “The Free” that included an epic poem about the meetings at Hippel’s and a couple of drawings that included Stirner. In the drawings, Stirner appears as a marginal, amused, and observant figure who is unruffled by the chaos and discord of the discussions. In the epic poem, Engels portrays “the noble Stirner” as the “peaceful enemy of all constraint.”

Look at Stirner, look at him, the peaceful enemy of all constraint.  
 For the moment, he is still drinking beer,  
 Soon he will be drinking blood as though it were water.  
 When others cry savagely “down with the kings”  
 Stirner immediately supplements “down with the laws also.”  
 Stirner full of dignity proclaims;  
 You bend your willpower and you dare to call yourselves free.  
 You become accustomed to slavery.  
 Down with dogmatism down with law.<sup>10</sup>

Even before the publication of *The Ego and Its Own*, Engels clearly understood that the central quality of Stirner’s egoist thought was the unchained criticism of all external constraints on the behavior and thoughts of the person.

In early 1843, Stirner met a young woman through their mutual affiliation in “The Free.” Marie Dähnhardt moved to Berlin from Dadebusch in 1838. She was from a bourgeois family and was a very well-educated, financially independent, and free-thinking woman. According to Mackay, Marie was slim, short, blonde, and full-figured. She was vivacious and exuded a healthy exuberance. She joyfully participated in the range of activities at Hippel’s, including the loud discussions, drinking beer, smoking cigars, and playing billiards. She apparently accompanied some of the men of “The Free” on occasional visits to brothels. Stirner married her on October 21, 1843, in a comical anticeremony that mocked more traditional, religion-centered matrimones. While Stirner and his new bride had radically different personalities, it is clear that he loved her. However, the marriage was tumultuous and dissolved, at her insistence, in April 1846, subsequent to a failed business venture that destroyed her fortune.<sup>11</sup>

## FROM THE EARLY WRITINGS TO *THE EGO AND ITS OWN*

In addition to his participation in the discussions at Hippel’s and his failed marriage, Stirner became a serious writer in the early 1840s. He initially became a correspondent for two regional newspapers, the *Rhein-*

ische Zeitung and the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*. He also contributed to the *Telegraph für Deutschland* and the censored *Berliner Monatsschrift*. He published over thirty articles in these papers that touched on issues pertaining to the authority of the state and the structure of social classes in Europe. John Henry Mackay collected the early publications of Stirner, most of which, unfortunately, still have not been translated into English. Stirner's early articles specifically included discussions on the taxation of the press, censorship of the press, the rights of Jews, and a review of Eugene Sue's serialized and highly controversial novel from 1842 to 1843, *The Mysteries of Paris*. Four of his early contributions are especially important for a study of Stirner's views on modernity because they are philosophic statements that reveal some of the basic ideas that were to be more fully developed in *The Ego and Its Own*.

In January 1842, Stirner published in the *Telegraph für Deutschland* a review and commentary on Bruno Bauer's satirical *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment over Hegel, the Atheist and Antichrist: An Ultimatum*.<sup>12</sup> Stirner's review makes it absolutely clear that he situated his own philosophic development in the context of the struggle of the Young Hegelians against both conservative Christianity and the "Old" or right-wing interpretations of Hegel. Bauer's *Trumpet* was published in November 1841 by Otto Wigand, the publisher who was supportive of many German radicals, including Stirner. Bauer argues in this piece that Hegelianism could not really be reconciled with any form of religious or political orthodoxy. Contrary to the arguments of the "Old" or right-wing Hegelians, Bauer demonstrates that Hegel cannot be viably understood as a defender of church, society, and state. Although this argument inspired and gave considerable intellectual ammunition to the cause of the "Young" Hegelians, it also pleased the anti-Hegelian conservatives who believed that, at base, Hegel was a revolutionary and an atheist. Bauer's *Trumpet* discredited the interpretations of the "Old" Hegelians and sharpened public identification of Hegel's thought with atheism and political radicalism. It effectively adumbrated the demise of the "Old Hegelianism" and helped transfer the mantle of Hegel's legacy to the "Young Hegelians."

Stirner's review of Bauer's satire is clear on at least two themes that appear in a more systematic form in *The Ego and Its Own*. First, whatever his differences with Hegel and Bruno Bauer, Stirner, at a minimum, agrees that Hegel was an atheist, antichrist, and political radical. Stirner points out that Hegel always advocated for the reconciliation of reason and religion, but this meant that religious knowledge was to be measured by human reason, logic and evidence, not faith. In other words, the reconciliation of reason and religion implies the subordination of religion to reason and the divine to the human. Stirner mocks the anti-Hegelian conservatives and the Old Hegelians by saying that anyone who looks for the

philosophic foundations of the “despicable pack of young Hegelians” will find, to his horror, that “the whole revolutionary wickedness, that is now bubbling forth from (Hegel’s) depraved students had already been in this morose and hypocritical sinner, who have long been taken as a keeper and a protector of the Faith.” Second, Stirner found in Hegel’s elevation of the human above the divine an argument for egoism.

Hegel, who would and has elevated the human spirit into the all-powerful Spirit, and has impressed this teaching upon his students that no one has to seek salvation outside of or beyond themselves, but rather are each their own Savior and Deliverer, has never made it his particular interest to lead a so-called “small war” and to hack out of its fortress the egoism which in a thousand fold form liberates individuals.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, it is not the “practical business” of the philosopher to help the “present world” solve its problems, or find its way out of its “discord.” The thinking individual is justified in pursuing his or her own interests. For Stirner, there can be no reconciliation between “truth” and “error” and no accommodation of critical philosophy with a corrupt church, state, and academy. The Young Hegelians, therefore, “openly cast away all godliness and modesty and openly struggle against Church and State.” Stirner clearly viewed himself as a Hegelian and allied himself with the Young Hegelians at this point in his career.

An April 1842 issue of the *Rheinische Zeitung* included an article by Stirner entitled, *The False Principle of Our Education, or Humanism and Realism*. *The False Principle* is a critique of the two philosophic orientations on pedagogy and curricula in Germany in the 1840s: humanism, which emphasizes understanding the past with the intent of producing detached, dispassionate scholars, and realism, which emphasizes practical learning and the cultivation of skills that enable persons to navigate everyday life. Stirner critiques humanism for its “empty elegance” and realism for its “tasteless materialism.” He argues that both philosophies promote collectivism and determinism and that the false choice between the two promotes the submission of the person to existing patterns of thinking and behaving by glorifying the past and accommodating oneself to the present. He concludes his essay by arguing that the challenge of modernity is the transformation of the knowledge process into “freedom of the will.” The goal of education is not to produce useful members of society, but to cultivate the development of free, “self-creating” people.<sup>14</sup>

In June 1842, just five months before Marx became editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Stirner published an essay on the dialectic of social life entitled *Art and Religion*, which is a fascinating application of Hegel’s theory of alienation to a critique of religion. It is also striking because of what it anticipates in the theory of alienation that Marx developed two years later

in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Stirner begins this essay with a statement about the origins of culture and social formations. Human beings tend to recognize that there is an *otherness* to their existence, or a tension between what they are and what they can become. Artistic expression is the creative force that gives form to human potential. It creates an object or a material form of an idea. Once externalized, the products of artistic creation become a collective representation of society, acquire symbolic importance supported by institutional power, and create a "disunion," or a "meaning over and against man." Once objectified and alienated, the products of human creativity appear as an outwardly expressed Ego that entails a fear of being "outside of oneself, having yourself as an Object, without being able to unite with it." The alienated object "annihilates" the individual by collapsing actuality and potentiality into the former. Religion is the celebration of this "disunion" because it explains the "disunion" as necessary and offers the "pious soul" a reconciliation of the "fragile spirit" of the person and the "unshakable Object." The "inspired piety" that seeks solace in religion is an inanity because "lack of creativity does not impede a life of dependency." It is only the creative spirit of art, and in particular comedy, that enables the individual to "deflate the Object," dissolve the "disunion" of thought and object, and to appropriate the products of human action.<sup>15</sup>

In 1843 Stirner wrote an essay on the "Liebestaat," or "love state," that was intended to be published by his friend Ludwig Buhl in a periodical entitled the *Berliner Monatsschrift*. However, its publication was obstructed by the Prussian censors, in part, because of Stirner's essay, which was deemed incompatible with "existing state principles" and the notions of love and fidelity on which it was supposedly based. The one and only issue of the *Berliner Monatsschrift* finally appeared in 1844. Stirner's article was titled "Some Preliminaries from the Love State." He intended this essay to be the first step in the development of a longer work, which was never published.<sup>16</sup>

The essay expresses the core of Stirner's developing political critique of humanism. The crux of his argument is that altruism, or the founding of political legitimacy upon duty to others or to "society," was the emerging ideology justifying oppression and alienation in modern political systems. It foreshadows important arguments Stirner makes in *The Ego and Its Own* about political sovereignty and individual freedom. Stirner grounds this argument initially in an assessment of the goals of the French Revolution or political liberalism—the doctrines of equality and freedom—and counterposes them to his concept of self-determination. In practice, modern liberal political systems reinterpreted the meaning of basic political ideals, such as equality and freedom, in a manner that bound individuals to the state by "love," or an unthinking devotion to a fictitious human essence. "Equality"



was redefined as bringing everyone to the same level of subservience to the state, or universalizing the dominance of the state over individuality. "Freedom" was redefined as the obligation to fulfill one's duty to others and the state. The core idea of the liberal state is "the duty of love" or the submission of the individual to the collectivity.

Stirner contrasts the humanist appropriation of "love" with an egoistic notion of "revolutionary freedom." In the former, the person defines self or determines self for the sake of others or in relation to others. In the latter, the person defines self or determines self purely from his or her own judgment and interests. In Stirner's view, there is an opposition between a "loving person" and a "rational person," suggesting that the abandonment of self-determination is not rational. If the liberal definition of love as self-sacrifice or subordination triumphs, the person loses will power. The "loveless" or dissatisfied reject the altruist concept that individuals must be subordinate to the state or the collectivity. Acquiescence or subordination to the state is not the first duty of the citizen.

Stirner would frequently spread a rumor to his friends among "The Free" that he was working on a "great philosophic work" that took up the "whole fabric of his thought." He would claim he had compiled page after page that would reveal the secret of his life and thought, occasionally pointing to a desk where his great work was concealed. No one was allowed to see it, no one had heard of it being examined. Edgar Bauer, who was convinced of Stirner's chronic indolence, thought it was a myth Stirner concocted merely to titillate his friends. Finally, in October 1844 Stirner's book, *The Ego and Its Own*, was published in Leipzig by Otto Wigand, the courageous and well-known publisher of the most important radical thinkers of the time, including Feuerbach, Bauer, and Arnold Ruge. Wigand expected that *The Ego and Its Own* would be confiscated by the authorities in Saxony as soon as it was placed in the hands of the regional censor. In preparation, Wigand loaded wagons with copies that were dispatched immediately to the booksellers upon the requisite presentation of the book to the representatives of Friedrich Wilhelm IV. As a result, 250 copies of the 1,000 copy first edition of *The Ego and Its Own* were confiscated. Days later, however, the ban was lifted by the Saxony Ministry of the Interior because the book was "too absurd" to be dangerous. In Prussia, the book was banned before Christmas. The ban remained in Prussia throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

The confiscation and ban did not prevent the book from being widely read and discussed. Book confiscations and bans tend to generate the opposite of the intended effect of preventing people from reading them. The immediate reception of *The Ego and Its Own* was nothing short of sensational. Youth in Berlin were especially enthusiastic about the book, passing copies from hand to hand, and eagerly discussing it as the beginning

of a new time of thinking and living. But the immediate reception of *The Ego and Its Own* was diverse. While some readers thought Stirner was a genius who had cleverly dissected the prevailing ideological justifications of authority and inequality, others thought the book was dangerous nonsense because it undermined the "cornerstones of all moral and social life." For many, the book was an irrational attack on venerated, eternal concepts, such as "right," "duty," and "morality," that protect civilization and keep barbarism at bay. Politicians were upset that Stirner denied the necessity of the state. Socialists were upset that Stirner demystified their plans to appropriate all property and subordinate all individuality to the state. The humanists were especially upset that Stirner smashed the carefully crafted logic supporting the new supreme being: "Humanity."

Despite the excitement *The Ego and Its Own* initially caused, it was not the type of book that could cultivate a large group of dedicated followers, or create a new school of thought that could challenge the prevailing, or emerging, orthodoxies. There was no long-term adulation or interest in the uncharismatic Stirner. There were critics, of course. Their comments and Stirner's responses are interesting, but fascination in *The Ego and Its Own* was short-lived and the book was quickly forgotten in popular culture until the late nineteenth century. Stirner himself soon slipped into an obscurity that enshrouded him the rest of his life. He continued to write and pursue his scholarly endeavors, which appear indirectly related to his egoist critique of modernity. In 1847 he published translations of the economic writings of J. B. Say and Adam Smith into German, which remain highly regarded translations of these classic writings on political economy. In 1852, he published an anthology of conservative responses to the social and political revolutions in Europe since 1789 titled, *The History of Reaction*. Stirner promised his publisher, Otto Wigand, that commentary would accompany these works, but he never provided it. Stirner spent the last decade of his life in poverty. He was incarcerated twice for failing to pay debts. He died suddenly in 1856 from a fever apparently contracted from an infected insect bite.

In 1882, Stirner's friend Edgar Bauer provided a portrait of the "terrorist of the self" in his later years,

Restrained, alone, quietly miserable, generally unnoticed, possibly working little, but always caring for good cigars—which apparently were the only things dear to him—being respectfully frugal, in poor quarters, but always well dressed, the man continued to exist as a Berliner. . . . You ask if Stirner was good-intentioned or hardhearted? Neither, insofar as he had neither will nor heart, he neither loved the good, nor valued hardness as such. He was dulled by a kind of egotistical calculation, but yet not armed with the armor of self-seeking. . . . Behind silver glasses a gentle look without any lust, normal size, clean clothes, easy mannered, inoffensive, not in the least ragged or silly.<sup>18</sup>

The emerging portrait of Max Stirner reveals an insouciant, somewhat indolent, and isolated scholar. The high point of his life was the publication of a provocative book that boldly asserts the dignity of the individual against a sociohistorical process that threatens debasement and annihilation. It is little wonder that there are conflicting and contradictory opinions about a man who wrote forcefully about the importance and consequence of the individual, but who seemed so unimportant and inconsequential himself. While his essays on Bauer's *Trumpet*, *The False Principle of Our Education*, *Art and Religion*, and the "Liebestaat" contain significant hints about the elements of his dialectical egoism, *The Ego and Its Own* is the sum and substance of Stirner's thought. Stirner himself argued that no individual can be legitimately reduced to the products of his or her labor, but his own historical and philosophic importance is based on *The Ego and Its Own*. Although an occasional reference to the early essays are helpful in illuminating aspects of dialectical egoism, it is really *The Ego and Its Own* that articulates Stirner's understanding of how modernity has affected the individual's relationship with self, culture, and society. A discussion of Stirner's egoist critique of modernity and its application by his philosophic progeny must be based on a review of what philosophers and scholars have said about Stirner and *The Ego and Its Own*, so that the contributions and gaps in the existing literature about Max Stirner can be identified.

### CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON STIRNER AND *THE EGO AND ITS OWN*

The commentary and scholarship on Stirner can be organized into categories based on the critics and analysts of dialectical egoism: (a) the other early critics, including Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians, (b) the Marxists, (c) the existentialists and psychoanalysts, (d) the communist-oriented anarchists, and (e) academic sociologists, Hegelian scholars, and post-modern theorists.

#### **The Early Critics of *The Ego and Its Own***

*The Ego and Its Own* received considerable attention and commentary soon after its publication. However, the number of reviews that were detailed, independent, and theoretically pertinent to the issues that concerned Stirner was very limited. The reviews themselves were largely, but not entirely, negative. Critiques appeared in a variety of journals and literary reviews in 1845–1847, including a fairly sympathetic analysis by René Taillandier in the French language *Revue des deux Mondes*. Arguably the

most interesting and informative early perspectives on *The Ego and Its Own* were written by other radical Hegelians, such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Moses Hess, and Karl Schmidt.

Feuerbach took an immediate interest in Stirner's work, obtaining a copy in the fall of 1844 and publishing a brief and focused review entitled, "The *Essence of Christianity* in Relation to *The Ego and Its Own*." It appeared in the second 1845 issue of Wigand's *Vierteljahrsschrift*.<sup>19</sup> Feuerbach expresses admiration for Stirner and his work, stating that *The Ego and Its Own* is an "intelligent" and "ingenious" statement that is also "eccentric, one-sided and falsely defined." Feuerbach attacks Stirner on several points, but he appears most upset by Stirner's argument that *The Essence of Christianity* mistakenly equates the "predicates," or essences, of "god" and "man." Feuerbach's core argument in *The Essence of Christianity* is that god is in reality a human construction which has divine or idealized qualities imputed to it by human beings. For Feuerbach, these qualities, or essences, are also the things that humans value or idealize about themselves. The divine, then, is really a construction of the best or finest qualities of human beings. In Feuerbach's terms, "Man is the God of Men." Human liberation requires the recognition that the "divine" is only the "human" reflected in an ideal form. Stirner's critique of Feuerbach's argument is that it is silly to argue that the two are the same since the ideal qualities or essences that humans project onto the divine are exaggerated and really do not describe human beings. Feuerbach responds in his commentary on *The Ego and Its Own* that the exaggerated or idealized qualities arise only because they pertain to an exaggerated or idealized subject, that is, god. When the idealized qualities are brought down to earth through the recognition of what "god" really is, a human construct, the predicates or essences will fit what humans actually are. Thus, there is no essential difference between the divine and the human, a restatement of the core idea of Feuerbach's humanism.

Moses Hess was a Young Hegelian and political activist, who, like Marx and Engels, sought the reinterpretation of Hegelian thought as the philosophic foundation for communism. He critiqued the other Young Hegelians from a socialist point of view. Hess published a brochure in 1845 entitled, *The Recent Philosophers*, which included a critique of Stirner's egoism.<sup>20</sup> Hess argues that there are two basic problems with Stirner's egoist philosophy. First, it is founded on the consciousness, or sense, of things that humans have, and not on the things themselves. Stirner's critique of egoists who preceded him, Hess says, is that they were not conscious of their egoism, or that they did not act on egoistic principles. Anticipating Marx and Engels somewhat, Hess rejects Stirner's thought as a form of subjective idealism that ignores real or material circumstances in the lives of individuals and in the history of a society. Stirner's egoism is

a one-sided philosophy. It includes a "for-itself" dimension, but not an "in-itself" dimension. There is a difference, he informs us, between a broken leg and one's sense of it. Stirner collapses all reality into the "for-itself," or the pure assertion of the individual. Like Christianity and all philosophy preceding socialism, Stirner's egoism dissociates theory and practice, the ideal and the real.

Hess carries his argument to the point that he asserts that the "unique one" can have no material or corporeal existence at all. The unique one is not only "spiritless" but "bodiless" as well. The "unique one" is an empty, hollow phrase, signifying nothing real. While Stirner attacks the abstractions of others, he creates new ones. Stirner's egoism can never address the experiences and aspirations of real persons since it ignores the real circumstances in which they exist. If it did, it would abandon the egoistic consciousness in favor of socialism. The second problem Hess identifies becomes apparent: it includes the "for-itself," but it has no room "for-one-another." Egoism, the "for-itself," says Hess, has been responsible for the most reprehensible forms of human behavior: slavery and class exploitation. The remedy, of course, is to elevate the "for-one-another" in thought, while pursuing the socialist unity of theory and practice through the acquisition of state power and elimination of private property.

Both Feuerbach and Hess proffered objections to Stirner that were based on collectivist constructs. Feuerbach defended his notion of the universality and commonality of human beings against Stirner's defense of the particularity of individuals. Hess objected to Stirner's egoism because he believed it obliterated the type of social and political solidarity that is needed to overcome human conflict and oppression. A young Hegelian philosopher named Karl Schmidt developed a critique of Stirner that did not promulgate another collectivist orientation, but instead advanced a form of individualism. In 1846, Schmidt published a book entitled *The Individual and the Realm of the Understanding* that proceeded along similar lines as Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* except that it moved from an understanding of nature to that of spirit and, then, to the individual.<sup>21</sup> Schmidt's treatise parallels *The Ego and Its Own* in interesting ways, including mimicking Stirner's discussion of the historical progression from antiquity to Christianity, as well as his critique of Feuerbach and Bauer.

It is particularly interesting that Schmidt concludes his book with a discussion of Stirner, as though *The Ego and Its Own* represents the apex of the development of Hegelian thought. In some respects, Schmidt's more obscure critique reflects a deeper understanding of Stirner than the other critics of *The Ego and Its Own*. Certainly, Stirner's work provided Schmidt with a springboard to advance his own individualist response to Hegelianism.

Schmidt makes many concessions to Stirner in his discussion of the individual, concurring with many aspects of Stirner's critique of Feuer-

bach's humanism, as well as his critique of socialism and communism. Most significantly, Schmidt agrees with Stirner that the individual is not the species. Feuerbachian and other collectivist constructs tend to absorb and transfer the individual to a "spirit-world and into a heaven," thus negating the person as a real, material, thinking, and feeling entity. Following Stirner, Schmidt says that the individual is not an idea. It does not convert the world into an idol to be worshipped, and it has nothing to do with duty, tasks, ideals, and causes. Departing from Stirner, he says, "the individual is not an idea, a fantasy, a thing of thought, or an ideal, just as he does not run with any of them, and he does not do so because he is not their opposite and is not ensnared by being their opposite."<sup>22</sup> The individual is neither good nor evil, conformist nor dissident, virtuous nor deviant, thoughtful nor thoughtless, selfish nor altruistic. Each of these labels implies qualities that are measured by a fictitious standard imposed by an external observer. They are spooks. The individual is not an egoist any more than she or he is a communist because she or he is beyond interests and mere profit, beyond both robbery and self-renunciation. If the individual is truly not the species, then the species no longer exists for the individual. All concepts that attempt to classify the individual into a species are spooks. The individual is not the exemplar for any ideal or cause. Therefore, Stirner's construction of the egoist or the unique one is contradictory and insufficiently radical. It uncritically accepts the philosophic ground that it attempts to destroy because it creates another behavioral ideal!

Although Stirner apparently never responded directly to Schmidt, he did respond to some of the attacks on *The Ego and Its Own* in an essay titled "Stirner's Critics," which appeared also in 1845 in the third issue of Wigand's publication *Vierteljahrsschrift*.<sup>23</sup> Stirner specifically addresses the criticisms offered by Feuerbach, Hess, and a representative of the Bruno Bauer's school of "critical criticism" who wrote under the pen name "Szeliga." Stirner's main foe, of course, is Feuerbach. He is particularly interested in commenting on Feuerbach's argument that there is no important difference between the essence of god and the essence of humanity since he considers this to be the crux of his difference with Feuerbach. Stirner argues that it makes little sense to argue that god is an exaggerated, idealized subject and that the divine essences are not exaggerated or idealized simply because constructs like "god" and "man" are inevitably defined by the predicates or essences assigned to them. If the subject is exaggerated or idealized, that is because the predicates or essences are also exaggerated or idealized. There must be a difference between the divine and the human because the predicates or essences assigned to each differ. Even Feuerbach, for all of his love of humanity, agrees that they are different.

Feuerbach's attempt to create a new humanism is really only a resurrection of religion because it intends to transform the human into the divine. It can only do this by mystifying what humans actually are. The mystification uncritically creates a fictional species—"Man"—and destroys the particularity or individuality of persons by reducing them to an abstract, idealized category. Hess and Szeliga evince a similar problem because both seek the dissolution of the particularity of individuals in favor of either political or philosophical categories. Both object that the "unique one" is an empty phrase, without content. Stirner responds that, of course, the phrase is without content because it was developed for analytical purposes. It is the person, the individual, not the phrase, who provides the content through his or her thoughts and actions. Hess has trouble understanding the distinction between the unique one and humanity, or a social class, because he seeks the disciplining of persons in the collective battle for communism. Szeliga has trouble understanding this because, like Feuerbach, he seeks the disciplining of individuals for the collective battle against Christian orthodoxy. Extrapolating from these responses, one can imagine Stirner's response to Schmidt. Unlike the unique one, it is Schmidt's individual that is without content because it is "for" nothing and is defined by nothing. Schmidt's vacuous critique of Stirner signaled the end of Young Hegelianism as a philosophic movement.

### **Stirner and the Marxists**

In terms of numbers of adherents, political influence, and the power of received wisdom, the most important commentary on *The Ego and Its Own* is, by far, that rendered by Marx and Engels. The lengthy polemic that Marx and Engels aim at Stirner in *The German Ideology* was preceded by a much more sympathetic, balanced, and analytical discussion that was part of a letter Engels sent to Marx in November, 1844.<sup>24</sup> Engels suggests that Stirner's "one-sidedness" can be refuted with a few simple "platitudes" that demonstrate people will eventually become communists "out of sheer egoism." Engels also recognizes that "the noble Stirner" must be taken as a point of departure in the emergent Marxist critique of capitalism. Communists must "adopt such truth as there is in the principle" of Stirner's dialectical egoism.

It is certainly true that we must first make a cause our own, egoistic cause, before we can do anything to further it. . . . [W]e are communists out of egoism also, and it is out of egoism that we wish to be *human beings*, not mere individuals. . . . Stirner is right in rejecting Feuerbach's "man," or at least the "man" of *The Essence of Christianity*. . . . If, however, the individual is the true basis, the true point of departure, for our "man," it follows that egoism—not of course Stirner's intellectual egoism alone, but also the egoism of the

heart—is the point of departure for our love of humanity, which otherwise is left hanging in the air.<sup>25</sup>

Engels obtained a copy of Stirner's book from Hess in late 1844 and soon passed it on to Marx. For Engels, at least upon his initial reading of *The Ego and Its Own*, Stirner's work is something of a breakthrough for the emerging socialist resistance to the "prevailing stupidity." Marx replied to this letter with one of his own sometime between November 18, 1844, and January 20, 1845, but his response has not been recovered.<sup>26</sup> Presumably, Marx's response suggests why the nature of the reaction to Stirner differs so dramatically in *The German Ideology*.

The deference that Marxists, critical theorists, postmodernists, and poststructuralists confer on Marx's assessment of Stirner in *The German Ideology* is a fascinating study in the clout wielded by ideologies that have been institutionalized in political movements, popular culture, and the halls of academe. *The German Ideology* has considerable interest and importance as a document revealing the early development of Marx's theory of history and society, and his attempts to settle scores with the Young Hegelians. Biographers of Marx from Sidney Hook to Isaiah Berlin to David McClelland comment on Marx's critique of Stirner as though *The German Ideology* is a masterpiece of social theory, the devastating final word on Stirner, and an important benchmark in Marx's creation of historical materialism as a new science of history and society.<sup>27</sup> Marxists, of course, are masterful at situating theoretical studies in their context. It may be helpful, therefore, to say a word or two about the context of *The German Ideology* in the course of examining Marx's critique of Stirner.

Marx drafted and Engels edited *The German Ideology* around April and May 1845 in Brussels, Marx having recently been expelled from Paris. The manuscript was not published during Marx's lifetime, which is a significant fact concerning its historical context. It was eventually published in 1932 by David Riazanov and the Marx-Engels Institute during the early years of forced collectivization, starvation, and mass imprisonment in Stalin's Russia. *The German Ideology* is comprised of two volumes. The first is titled, "Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Stirner." The second volume is titled, "Critique of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets." The "critique" of Stirner constitutes approximately two-thirds of the first volume. If the time, energy, and number of pages devoted to their critique are any indication, Marx and Engels appear to be more disturbed by Stirner than by Feuerbach or Bruno Bauer. Or, they believed that Stirner was a more troublesome philosopher, more difficult to discard. The second volume of *The German Ideology* does not include a discussion of Stirner since Marx and Engels correctly assess that Stirner was not a socialist.



The method Marx and Engels employ in *The German Ideology* is a curious amalgam of insult, ad hominem attacks, reductio ad absurdum argumentation, and vituperative political commentary. Moreover, the manuscript was poorly edited and formatted, replete with repetitious arguments, choppy paragraphs, and tables and comparisons that are neither labeled nor referenced in the text. It contains syllogisms that use abundant equation symbols that are not explained in a narrative form. It is not too difficult to understand why the manuscript was published only after the death of Marx and Engels by The Marx-Engels Institute, the purveyor of ideological purity in Stalin's Russia. *The German Ideology* was not a finished or polished manuscript. Indeed, it was rejected for publication at least once and left by Marx and Engels to the "gnawing criticism of rodents." How ironic, then, that *The German Ideology* has been taken as the definitive Marxist statement on Stirner and *The Ego and Its Own!*<sup>28</sup>

In Marx's other publications and manuscripts from this period, there is a discernible method that undergirds the critique he offers of his philosophic adversaries. "On the Jewish Question" is an interesting early essay that explores why "political emancipation" is insufficient to liberate groups dominated by various forms of racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination. Marx argues that political emancipation must be supplemented by a revolution in social relations. His *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"* explores many of the contradictions in Hegel's conception of sovereignty and political legitimacy. The *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* includes discussion of many important topics, paramount among these is Marx's celebrated essay on "estranged labor," which critiques classical political economics by arguing that it inevitably produces several forms of alienation. In each of these manuscripts, Marx proceeds using the methods of immanent and transcendental critique. The process in each begins with an effort at a faithful elaboration of the arguments of Bruno Bauer, Hegel, and the classical political economists, highlighting the prominent values or goals each intends to promulgate. It then draws out the implications of their thought for social relations, or how their ideas would "play out" in society and history. Marx then moves to a critique by either demonstrating how the implications contradict the stated values or goals of the philosopher, which is a form of immanent critique. Or, he demonstrates how they conflict with the notion of what it means to be human, how humans must be understood in their *species being*, a form of transcendental critique.<sup>29</sup>

What is especially remarkable about *The German Ideology*, from a methodological standpoint, is that there is precious little in the way of either immanent or transcendental critique, a marked departure from these other early publications and manuscripts. In the discussion of Stirner in *The German Ideology*, Marx includes many isolated quotes from *The Ego*

*and Its Own*, but he does not provide a faithful or reasoned synopsis of Stirner's work. Instead, Stirner's quotes are extracted from the text at various points and followed by bitter, angry, arrogant comments that are intended to ridicule Stirner and his thought. In contrast to other publications and manuscripts from this period, Marx does not give us a clue what Stirner's philosophy is all about. *The German Ideology* does not attempt to understand and critique Stirner on his own terms. Moreover, Marx does not critique Stirner from any notion of what it means to be human in a behavioral sense, or from the standpoint of understanding humans in their *species being*. It is indisputable that Marx *could* have pursued a similar type of critique of Stirner that appears in "On the Jewish Question," *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* and *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, but he did not. The reader of *The German Ideology* is left with little more than a critique that assails Stirner for (a) not adopting a socialist interpretation of society and history, (b) not understanding individuals in their sociohistorical context, and (c) not promoting the basic elements of the ideal communist society, the boilerplate criticisms that Marxists level at all of their opponents. Marx and Engels are upset that Stirner believed in private property and supported "free competition." In short, for Marx and the communists and socialists who followed him, the problem with Stirner is that he refuses to acquiesce to the socialist or humanist reconstructions of Hegelianism, with their absolute collectivism and unbridled statism. Marx and Engels deride Stirner as a typical "petty bourgeois individualist intellectual" and who had a minor influence on the "immature outlook" of craftsmen who resisted becoming proletarians and, consequently, rejected the organization and discipline offered by socialist theory and movements. Stirner's critique of the state and his promotion of the assertion of each individual's dignity supposedly does not change "existing social relations" or their "economic basis." Thus, like every theory that disagrees with Marxism, Stirner's dialectical egoism is fundamentally a "disguise for an *apologia* of the bourgeois system." Marx and Engels, who value historical facts above all else, conclude that only a communist revolution can break the fetters of capitalist exploitation.<sup>30</sup>

*The German Ideology* is variously praised as a landmark in the creation of Marx's philosophy of history because it includes the initial statement of categories such as "mode of production" and "social class." Marx's critique in *The German Ideology* secured for him the honor of being "the true father of modern economic theory, and, indeed, of modern sociology." His critique of Stirner is heralded as an achievement as its "effects have become part of the permanent background of civilized thought."<sup>31</sup> Marx's encounter with Stirner in *The German Ideology* may have significance in understanding the development of historical materialism, but it is not a particularly good guide to understanding *The Ego and Its Own* and the contributions

and problems in Stirner's dialectical egoist critique of modernity. It certainly should not be taken as the final word on Stirner's egoism.

### **Stirner and the Existentialists**

Intellectual historians of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy have occasionally made more than a passing reference to the surface affinity between Stirner's radical individualism and existential thought. Existentialism is the label that has been applied to a body of literature that is focused on the human subject's immediate conditions of existence as the point of departure for philosophic reasoning. Existentialists are not merely interested in the thinking, free subject of Hegelianism, but in the human individual as a totality, including the person's feelings and physical existence. Existential philosophy generally begins with the notion that persons experience a sense of disorientation and confusion as they confront a world that is "absurd," or which they believe has no inherent meaning. The basic challenge to the person in the framework of existentialism is to find, assign, or create a sense of meaning, purpose, and order in everyday life. Given the basic parallels between existentialism and Stirner's radical individualism, it is somewhat surprising that Stirner is not usually regarded as an important early proponent of existentialism. It is helpful to understand what existentialists have said, and what they have left unsaid, about Stirner to fully appreciate the superficiality of the relationship between them.

Alienation is an important theme in existentialist literature, as it is in Hegelianism, Marxism, and Stirner's dialectical egoism. In 1844, the same year that Marx wrote the celebrated essay on alienated labor in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and Stirner published *The Ego and Its Own*, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard published his book, *The Concept of Dread*. Marx was concerned with alienation as it was generated in the labor process under capitalist conditions of production. Stirner was concerned with the alienation of the person from self. Kierkegaard was concerned with the alienation of the individual from God. Kierkegaard was a fierce critic of Hegel and the forms of atheism he believed Hegelianism produced. He was also a strident critic of the Danish Peoples Church, the official state church of Denmark at the time. Anticipating the core themes of later existential thought, Kierkegaard recognized that belief systems like religion need to become more meaningful to individuals. Kierkegaard did not deny the importance or contributions of Christianity, but believed that religion had to speak to the everyday fears, anxieties, and aspirations of persons if it was to be relevant and meaningful in their lives. Kierkegaard's philosophic standpoint has been identified as a type of "Christian existentialism" since it was thoroughly rooted in

existentialist themes and sought assistance from Christianity in overcoming alienation. Kierkegaard's existentialism does not seek emancipation from God and other abstractions that subordinate the individual to the state, culture, and society.<sup>32</sup>

The religiously oriented existentialists who followed Kierkegaard, such as Martin Buber and Paul Tillich, despite their differences, espoused positions that had similar implications for Stirner's egoism. Both are sympathetic to the existential fact that individuals are challenged to make sense out of their own lives, but hostile to the notion that religion is an obstacle to emancipation.<sup>33</sup> There might seem to be more parallels between Stirner's thought and the writings of the atheistic existentialists since, in both depictions of the human condition, the world becomes a totality only as meaning is assigned to the objects within it. However, there are still important differences. Stirner remains the "polar opposite" of where the atheistic existentialists terminate their philosophic journeys. Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, believed that persons are perpetually dissatisfied in their hunger for meaning and consciousness. Stirner's unique one is focused on the appropriation and use of life for self-enjoyment and self-fulfillment. Significantly, although there are occasional whispers or shadows of Stirnerite concepts in their writings, neither Heidegger nor Sartre ever mention Stirner by name. It is only with the work of the French playwright and philosopher Albert Camus that we have record of a specific encounter between Stirner's ideas and atheistic existentialism.<sup>34</sup>

In *The Rebel*, Camus is concerned with elaborating a philosophy of politics that is sensitive to the reciprocal relationship between the individual and macrolevel political dynamics. The argument in the book is that individual rebellion and social revolt are necessary and important elements of political life and human existence. Camus was a libertarian leftist who was critical of the communists and had a profound sympathy for the French anarchists in the 1950s. The rebel is the person who says "no" to existing political conditions and cultural constraints, but who also says "yes" to another set of values and, potentially, a new set of political and cultural realities. This duality is not only a standard that Camus uses to assess the many literary, philosophic, and political rebels he discusses, it is also the source of an existential paradox for the collective political life of humanity. Individual rebellion begins with persons gladly sacrificing their liberties and lives for values that celebrate individuality and personal dignity. As rebellion evolves into social revolt and revolution, dictatorship and totalitarianism become a temptation and a threat. Rebellion is rooted in the value of individual liberty but its revolutionary manifestation tends to lead to institutionalized violence and statism. For Camus, the rebel is preferable to the revolutionary. In France during the late 1940s throughout the 1960s,

communism was the primary instrument that converted the impulse to rebel into a totalitarian nightmare. It was the most important, but not the only, threat to the values that attempted to protect individual freedom and dignity. Hence, Camus believed that anarchism was the only political ideology that maintained a sense of morality as it confronted its adversaries. This was a sharp contrast to Heidegger's flirtation with Nazism and Sartre's involvement with the French communists. For Camus, the atheistic existentialist cannot abandon morality and conscience.

Camus correctly understands that Stirner is repulsed by revolution and the prospect of new forms of institutionalized violence and ideological domination. However, Camus also sees Stirner's dialectical egoism as an absolute negation that "submerges every aspect of affirmation. It also sweeps away the substitutes for divinity with which the moral conscience is encumbered."<sup>35</sup> Camus' effort in *The Rebel* to save ethics and morality as a bulwark against communist terrorism prompts him to make several exaggerated and false arguments against Stirner. He accuses Stirner, who is "drunk with destruction," of pushing blasphemy as far as he can, ignoring Stirner's intent to undermine the reality and power of fixed ideas. Stirner is also guilty of legitimating criminal violence, giving rise to "terrorist forms of anarchy." Camus ignores Stirner's dismissal of political terrorists as possessed by "spooks." He ignores Stirner's carefully articulated distinction between ordinary crime and the criminal who violates the "sacred" institutionalized ideas and behavior of society. Camus concludes that Stirner's absolute negation of "God," "Humanity," and "Society" creates a desert of isolation for amoral individuals who live only through their transgressions against one another. Stirner's radical individualism or extreme egoism is a major frustration in Camus' efforts to rescue morality by portraying rebels as noble and ethical, in contrast to revolutionaries. But Camus ignores Stirner's lesson that ideas about the cosmos and morality can be every bit as constraining, exploitative, and violent as totalitarian regimes are to dissidents. Thus, the existentialist who denies the existence of God and the legitimacy of the state, has only ethics and conscience left to reconstruct social life and overcome the person's dread of an absurd cosmos. Stirner's assault on ethics just will not do.

The English version of *The Rebel* was enthusiastically introduced by Sir Herbert Read, a contemporary of Camus who was also an artist, cultural critic, and fellow sympathizer of anarchist ideas and movements. Read included a chapter on Stirner in his book of literary and political criticism *The Tenth Muse*. Read reports that, once read, Stirner's book is "persistently recalled to memory." Read's interest in Stirner is focused on the relationship and possible influence on psychoanalysis, personalism, and existentialism, each of which, as far as Read is concerned, is fundamentally interested in how the self-other relationship structures the person's

sense of meaning. Like Marx, Read is concerned that Stirner's philosophy is imbued with the "spirit of competition" and may actually be supportive of private property and free competition, an abomination for both state socialists and radical intellectuals who simply cannot endorse such commonplaces as everyday commerce. For Read, Stirner's philosophy is primarily a treatise on the self, or the individual's encounter with an essentially absurd world. "Marxian criticism does not touch it at all."<sup>36</sup>

While Read is clearly not a convinced Stirnerite, he finds that Stirner's egoism has an affinity with, and may be a precursor of, both psychoanalysis and existentialism. As Read points out, "Stirner was really only concerned, as Erich Fromm has been in our time, to insist that freedom is a very ambiguous term—that there is all the difference between freedom *from* and freedom *for* something." Read observes that Stirner argued that freedom is a "hollow word" if the "free" person or the "free" group lacks the power, or "might," to realize it in the material world. For Stirner, as for "modern psychologists," freedom is essentially self-liberation; the person is free only to the extent that he or she can procure freedom for self. The person's selfishness, or appetite for procuring freedom and other social desiderata, is a "plea for the integration of the personality." It reflects only the fact that the self-other relationship requires a self. Drawing from Erich Fromm's analysis of love, Read defends Stirner's egoism as a simple statement that one's love for others is dependent upon one's love of self, or one's self-regard. Consistent with the analysis of love by Fromm and Jung, Stirner argues that love cannot be commanded and occurs only with the "consciousness of egoism." It occurs because it makes the person happy or because the person chooses to love. It is a "fellow-feeling" with every "feeling being." Because of the choice to love, the person is tormented by that which torments the object of his or her love, and refreshed by that which refreshes the object of his or her love. Read reports approvingly that Stirner's egoism allows for people to kill each other, but not to torture each other. It is the "feeling for right, virtue," not egoism, that makes people hardhearted and intolerant. Read concludes that Stirner's discussion of love is as subtle as it is profound; it is not surprising that the "most profound of modern philosophers," such as Martin Buber, have appreciated the depth of this part of Stirner's work.<sup>37</sup>

Read also discovers that the "fashionable doctrine of existentialism must owe something to Stirner" because the similarities are too frequent and intense to be accidental. Setting Camus, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger aside, Read argues that Sartre's plays and novels "are constructed round (sic) a philosophy which seems to me to be identical with Stirner's (plus a little American pragmatism)." Despite the lack of any evidence that Sartre studied *The Ego and Its Own* or included Stirner's concepts into any of the various incarnations of his philosophy, Read says that Sartre's heroes all

discover that freedom is basically an illusion and that ideologies typically function to enslave and not liberate. Eventually, Sartrean characters come to oppose metaphysical and hypothetical constructions of everyday life, just as Stirner argues against alienation and reification. Ultimately, they discover that they are alone in an absurd, hostile world and must rely upon themselves to construct a sense of meaning and order.<sup>38</sup>

Read presents a portrait that is sympathetic but also fearful of the implications of egoist thought for the delicate place he creates for Stirner in his history of modern ideas. For Read, Stirner's egoism is a plea for some attention to the well-being of the person in the chaotic and neurotic modern world. Stirner is not an enemy of modernity. In Read's analysis, Stirner's ideas do not pose a threat to the legitimacy of the state, the economy, the culture, and the self-other relationship of the modern world. It is really a misunderstood treatise on the lonely, confused individual seeking succor, meaningful social relationships, and institutions that are more sensitive to the nature of the self. Read's "defense" of Stirner denudes *The Ego and Its Own* of its explosive content.

Read's anarchism is not a critique of state power nor a street-level challenge to authority or the established order. It is an appeal for inclusion of the aesthetic and the creative in the social institutions of modernity. He uses Stirner to argue for the inclusion of a philosophy of self-liberation into the prevailing ideologies of modernity. To the extent that Stirner's ideas can be included with such felicity into the received wisdom of modernity, his critique is rendered impotent. Neither psychoanalysis nor existentialism pose a serious political challenge. Both help to mitigate the conflict between the individual and social institutions. Both are expressions of the generalized accommodation to modernity. Since Stirner is helpful to persons experiencing alienation, his critique is easily defeated by the thought systems of modernity. Stirner is reduced to an interesting precursor of Fromm and Sartre. He is reduced to the status of a coconspirator in the psychoanalytic and existentialist accommodations with modernity. The most important contrast between the Marxist and existentialist reading of Stirner is that Marx at least understood that Stirner is a threat. Marx's analysis may be a much more important assessment than Read's efforts to defend Stirner by finding points of rapprochement between dialectical egoism and the science and culture of modernity.

### **Stirner and the Anarchists**

Much of the analytic discussion of Stirner appears in surveys of the history of anarchist thought and social movements. Beginning with the interesting discussion and typology by Paul Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists: Ideas and Teachings of Seven Major Thinkers*, which originally appeared in

1894, several scholars and intellectuals attempted to subsume a discussion of Stirner's ideas under the broader rubric of anarchism. Typically, these surveys treated Stirner as though he is merely the most extreme example of individualist anarchism and, thus, is part of an intellectual tradition that is best defined by a common desire to eliminate the state as a social institution. These surveys of anarchist thought link Stirner with such diverse thinkers such as William Godwin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, and Benjamin Tucker, but also have difficulty reducing Stirner to a compatriot of collectivist anarchists. The reduction of Stirner to an anarchist usually occurs through the studied neglect of Stirner's critique of alienation through his concept of "ownness" and his analysis of the macrolevel social and political structures of modernity. At issue is whether Stirner's thought is a good fit with the anarchist tradition. In these surveys of anarchist thought, Stirner gets invited to the party, but is not a welcomed guest.

Eltzbacher's book was first published in English by Benjamin Tucker, translated from the German by Stephen T. Byington, the same folks who made *The Ego and Its Own* first available in English.<sup>39</sup> Eltzbacher was a German jurist who, partly because of his study of anarchism, became a professor of commercial law at the Handelshochschule in Berlin in 1906. He was eventually elected to the Reichstag and became a proponent of Bolshevism after World War I. In *The Great Anarchists*, Eltzbacher sought "scientific" knowledge of anarchism through a review of the ideas of Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Tolstoy, and Tucker. For each of these theorists, Eltzbacher examines (a) the fundamental argument for anarchism, (b) the conception of law in society, (c) the nature and role of the state, (d) the legitimacy of the distribution of property, and (e) how the new stateless society will appear and what it will look like. Eltzbacher aims at the construction of an elaborate taxonomy of anarchist thought intended to demonstrate points of agreement and disagreement.

For Eltzbacher, Stirner is the supreme individualist whose self-interest or "self-welfare" must be pursued regardless of the specifics of time or space. The institutions that inhibit the egoist's pursuit of his or her self-interest, such as law and the state, have no legitimacy. In fact, law and the state exist by virtue of generalized beliefs that they are sacred, not because individuals recognize that they are favorable to "self-welfare." In Eltzbacher's words, Stirner is an anarchist because his egoism leads to the idea that "every man's welfare demands that a social human life, solely on the basis of its precepts, should take place of the State."<sup>40</sup> To his credit, Eltzbacher acknowledges that Stirner seeks something of a reconstruction of social life through the notion of the "union of egoists" and that much of Stirner's thought is founded on the idea of "ownness" or the individual owning his or her life. Eltzbacher distorts Stirner by trying to fit him into



a leftist pigeon hole by equating his egoist critique of property with the socialist seizure of private property by an organized movement favorable to the lower classes. Eltzbacher does not discuss or develop Stirner's critique of alienation and reification. The fundamental problem with Eltzbacher's discussion is that Stirner's presumed anarchism becomes the master concept or lens through which the entirety of his thought is interpreted. Once Stirner is defined first and foremost as an anarchist, other elements of his thought, such as his emphasis on ownness, are relegated to supporting roles.

George Woodcock's classic study of anarchism reveals a similar problem.<sup>41</sup> Woodcock was a Canadian by birth, but lived much of his life in Great Britain. He became a left-oriented anarchist early in his adulthood. He was a pacifist by conviction and a conscientious objector in deed during WWII. After the war, he returned to Canada and taught at the University of British Columbia until the 1970s. He was a prolific writer and published highly regarded studies of Proudhon, Godwin, Kropotkin, Oscar Wilde, and George Orwell, in addition to *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, which appeared in 1962. Woodcock devotes a brief eleven-page chapter to Stirner in his study, which is remarkable in the depth of its analysis of the communist anarchists, and the brevity and superficiality of its discussion of the individualist anarchists. In addition to the scant treatment he gives Stirner, Woodcock dispenses with the entire tradition of individualist anarchism in America in two pages that completely fails to discuss the ideas of Tucker and Lysander Spooner. Woodcock's book considers communist anarchism to be the main course; the individualist variants are less interesting and far less important.

Stirner does not fare much better than Tucker or Spooner in Woodcock's account. Most of the chapter devoted to Stirner in Woodcock's *Anarchism* does not discuss his ideas, but focuses on the known facts about Stirner's life, dropping names and relating anecdotes about Stirner and the young Hegelians in Berlin. In fact, *Anarchism* spends no more than five pages discussing the content of *The Ego and Its Own*, much of which is Woodcock's characterization, rather than an exposition of Stirner's ideas. Woodcock does not discuss Stirner's relationship to Hegel. He does not mention the dialectic nor Stirner's understanding of modernity. He mistakenly credits Marx with having published Stirner's essay *The False Principle of Our Education* and seems certain that Nietzsche was one of Stirner's disciples. To Woodcock's credit, he recognizes that "ownness" is the central category of Stirner's dialectical egoism, but he finds it repugnant that Stirner attributes more importance to ownness than to freedom. He acknowledges that Stirner's egoist and the anarchists share the state as a common enemy, but the anarchists, of course, have nobler goals and a valid rationale. He says Stirner's tract is "passionately anti-intellectual," it

"praises crime and murder," and anticipates "the reckless criminals whose presence darkened the anarchist movement" during the 1880s and 1890s. Perhaps Stirner's biggest affront to the anarchist establishment is that he produced "a brilliant essay" enshrouded by "tedious" and "appalling verbosity," which is presumably absent from the anarchist tomes written by Godwin and Proudhon. Woodcock does not deign to examine Stirner's writings as a body of ideas. *The Ego and Its Own* is merely Stirner "crying out in the wilderness," raging against his luckless, hapless, insubstantial, isolated life as a schoolteacher who spent much of his time evading numerous creditors and caring for a disturbed mother.<sup>42</sup>

Woodcock is sympathetic to anarchism, but not the individualist, assertive sort propounded by Stirner and his progeny. Woodcock does not really know what to do with Stirner. He does not focus on Stirner's ideas because they differ so markedly from the pantheon of antistate leftists he sees as the real or legitimate representatives of anarchist thought and practice. Stirner is not a good companion of the more civilized likes of Godwin, Kropotkin, and Proudhon, antistatists who do not dispute the subordinate role of the individual to the collectivity. Woodcock's antipathy to Stirner and his failure to discuss Stirner's egoism in the context of its dialectical moorings is emblematic of the entirety of collectivist or communist critiques of Stirner.

John Clark in *Max Stirner's Egoism* paints a similar portrait of Stirner from a communist anarchist viewpoint, or as he calls it a "social anarchism" that is not sympathetic to individualism because of its "inadequacy."<sup>43</sup> Clark's study was published in 1976 by Freedom Press in London, a communist anarchist organization that was also responsible for publishing the long running anarchist newspaper called "Freedom." Clark's book, although it aims at a fair and reasoned treatment of Stirner's ideas, nevertheless intends to examine the "metaphysical and ethical dimensions of Stirner's thought," concepts that Stirner took great care to refute in *The Ego and Its Own*. Clark's interest is in dealing with Stirner's "metaphysical and ethical egoism." The immediate problem is that Clark creates an analysis of Stirner using categories that are rejected in *The Ego and Its Own*.

Despite the problems inherent in his purpose, Clark begins his book in a promising manner by stating that the influence of Hegel on Stirner's thought is inescapable and "is shaped from beginning to end by its relationship of opposition to the Hegelian system." Yet, the only thing that Clark says about the Hegel-Stirner relationship is that Stirner opposed the Hegelian notion of Spirit as an "absorption of the individual into the totality" and proposes instead a "total reabsorption of the Absolute (or Spirit in any form) into the individual ego, its original creator." This is a nice turn of the phrase but it offers little substance about the Hegel-Stirner

relationship. It says nothing about the dialectic or the nature of critique that Hegel and Stirner both employed. It is apparent early on in his discussion that Clark is interested above all in making the case for social anarchism as the political ideology that is most appropriate for dealing with the problems of the late twentieth century. He says,

Anarchism is the one major political theory which has attempted to synthesize the values of negative and positive freedom into a single, more comprehensive view of human liberty. In its emphasis on community and equality, it recognizes the importance of self-realization through participation, and the ability of all to share in the benefits of society's labor.<sup>44</sup>

Stirner appropriately ridicules collectivist reifications such as "society's labor" and the conflation of collectivist concepts like "community" and "equality" with "self-realization." For Clark, the biggest issue in the study of Stirner's egoism is whether Stirner can be legitimately called an anarchist. Clark cannot reconcile the issue because he knows that Stirner is both an enemy of the state and the collectivist utopia that "social anarchists" want to impose on individuals and society. Stirner critiques modernity. Clark thinks the big issue is the conflict between liberal capitalism and communism. Most significantly, perhaps, Clark refuses to engage in a conversation about Stirner's notion of ownness. Clark understands that Stirner differentiates freedom and ownness, but he does not develop the notion of ownness. Without explanation, he argues that Stirner is not clear about the relationship between freedom and ownness. He discusses at length Isaiah Berlin's distinction between positive and negative freedom, but does not discuss how Stirner's concept of ownness relates to or differs from either type of freedom.<sup>45</sup> Clark attempts to outline what Stirner might mean by freedom. But, what is ownness in Stirner's writings? Why is Stirner interested in it? Why is it more important in Stirner's work than either negative or positive freedom? How is ownness the basis of Stirner's critique of modernity, the state, and capitalism? Clark's discussion of Stirner suffers from (a) his imposition of a political agenda that is intolerant of individualism and (b) a failure to examine the core concepts in Stirner's philosophy. Clark sets up and attacks a straw man, a pseudo-Stirner.

The basic issue that appears in the communist anarchist portrait of Stirner is whether he is an anarchist. The consistent conclusion is that Stirner, the enemy of the state, does not measure up as a bona fide anarchist because he does not share the collectivist enthusiasm for community and equality. The left-oriented anarchists simply cannot reconcile Stirner's notion of ownness and the individual's appropriation of life with their ideal of a stateless society where property is owned in common, and the mob sets the moral agenda.

## Stirner and the Academics

Stirner has also been the topic of numerous academic studies since the 1970s that are supposedly guided by the canons of contemporary scholarship and, thus, purport to be more detached and less polemical than the partisan assessments by Marxists, anarchists, and existentialists. Stirner has been included in important studies of the history of ideas, particularly in the nineteenth century. He has been the focal point of studies that sought an understanding of his egoism by relating it to, and differentiating it from, other thinkers and philosophical tendencies. He has also been studied as an important thinker in his own right with an interest in understanding the meaning, origins, and context of his thought.

Karl Löwith includes an extensive discussion of Stirner in his survey of the development of German philosophy in the nineteenth century, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in 19th Century Thought*.<sup>46</sup> Löwith was a student of Heidegger and was primarily concerned with the decline of classical German philosophy in the nineteenth century, particularly as it undermined the religious foundation of philosophy and provided the opening for the reconstruction of philosophy rooted in atheism and nihilism. Hegel and Nietzsche occupy the beginning and end points of a process that produced the philosophic transcendence of religion and the destruction of the Christian foundation of disciplined inquiry into nature, society, and individuality. While his influence was not as significant as that of Marx or Nietzsche, Löwith argues that Stirner was an important part of this "revolution" because *The Ego and Its Own* heralded the reduction of inquiry and knowledge to the "self-revelation of the individual." Stirner also appropriated the notion of "man" or "humanity" on behalf of the individual. The agenda of *The Ego and Its Own* is the "systematic destruction of the divine and the human." Feuerbach and the young Hegelians had certainly pursued the "death of God," but Stirner challenged the notion that the domination of individuals by fixed ideas could be achieved by elevating other universal ideals or abstractions, such as "humanity" or "society," to the status of the divine. In doing so, Stirner eliminated not only the distinction between what is divine and what is human, but also the distinction between what persons are "intrinsically" and what they are "accidentally."<sup>47</sup>

It is unfortunate that Löwith's discussion suffers from a failure to explore the reasons why Stirner sought the elimination of the human as well as the divine, or why he reduced knowledge to individual self-revelation. Löwith does not include in his discussion a consideration of the more positive or affirmative side of Stirner's philosophy captured in the notion of "ownness" as the basis for the egoist's reconstruction of individuality and society. As a Jewish scholar, Löwith knew full well the horror that the philosophic

elevation of collective abstractions in society, coupled with violent, authoritarian political regimes, can wreak upon persons and society. Löwith interprets Stirner's egoism as part of the process that made philosophy a coconspirator in the holocausts of the twentieth century. Absent notions of the divine and the human, anything is possible, including murder on an industrial scale. The excision of the notion of "ownness," the potential appropriation of self and the life-world, from a description of Stirner's philosophy is not only a significant misrepresentation, but enables Löwith to fold Stirner neatly into a linear process of intellectual decline that results in a prevailing nihilistic conception of society and individuality, making predation and mass murder a commonplace of political practice.

A similar problem appears in R. W. K. Paterson's study *The Nihilistic Egoist Max Stirner*.<sup>48</sup> Paterson's book on Stirner is noteworthy for several reasons. First, during the so-called revival of Stirner during the 1970s, Paterson produced the only comprehensive study of Stirner in English. Second, Paterson differs from other writers of the period in his study of Stirner because he builds a focused case that attacks Stirner directly for his egoism and nihilism. Despite its faults, Paterson's treatise is at least an integrated discussion of Stirner's "nihilistic egoism," a marked departure from most other commentary at the time. Paterson propounds a point of view from the first page to the last. Third, Paterson's assessment of Stirner is founded on a reaction to *The Ego and Its Own* that is horrified by its total atheism and rejection of all absolutes and external constraints on the individual. Paterson wants to identify Stirner's true place in the history of social thought, but he is so disturbed by *The Ego and Its Own* that he devotes most of the book to dissociating Stirner from all other philosophic positions he considers acceptable or legitimate, including Marxism, anarchism, existentialism, and even Nietzsche's individualism. Paterson is also somewhat unique in his assessment because, unlike Clark and Löwith, he is interested in discussing Stirner's notion of ownness.

In Paterson's treatment, *The Ego and Its Own* is the product of a disturbed individual. Not only does Paterson judge Stirner's life to be an outward failure, he states that the "destructivism" and "negativism" in *The Ego and Its Own* represent the "conceptual expression of the paranoid schizophrenia suffered by the philosopher who was at once the book's author and its subject." Paterson's remarkable admission of the purpose of his book displays the circularity of its argument. His study is founded on a judgment of Stirner's insanity, but seeks to establish the psychological character of Stirner through an analysis of his writings. To be sure, Paterson boasts that he cannot conclude that Stirner's entire intellectual construction originate in his "viciously schizoid obsessions" without "unmasking" the argument of *The Ego and Its Own*. The quest to unmask *The Ego and Its Own* is really a quest to unmask Max Stirner, the "paranoid

schizophrenic." Scholarship on Stirner, says Paterson, is really an opportunity to present an extraordinary "spectacle" because its deranged author provides an "unprecedented opportunity to study the metaphysical structure of a nihilistic system formulated in the unabashed first person with classical directness and lucidity."<sup>49</sup> Paterson, an education professor who postures himself as an expert in clinical psychoses, argues that only a deranged man could produce a book like *The Ego and Its Own*. The "direct and lucid" argument in *The Ego and Its Own* is sufficient evidence of derangement. While he does not clearly identify himself as partisan, Paterson's study makes no pretense at objectivity or even interest in Stirner's thought. Paterson's book is little more than an ad hominem attack on Stirner, lacking any insight into Stirner's views on modernity.

Donald Nielson is a sociologist who examines variations of moral experience and cultural expression in modern society.<sup>50</sup> His book, *Horrible Workers*, is a study that uses Émile Durkheim's sociological theory of suicide as a basis for understanding how persons adapt to the external and constraining social facts that regulate their lives. "Horrible workers" is a reference to a quote by Arthur Rimbaud about those individuals who develop an alternative vision of life through "a long, boundless and systematic derangement of all the senses." His book examines Stirner, Rimbaud, the blues guitarist Robert Johnson, and the "Charles Manson circle" as all "horrible workers." He is interested in Stirner because of the discussion of the "transcendental ego" that appears in *The Ego and Its Own*. For Nielsen, Stirner develops a "religion of the transcendental ego" in response to the dislocations and chaos of the modern world. One of the categories that Durkheim left undeveloped in *Suicide* is fatalistic suicide, or the form of suicide that occurs because of overly constraining external moral codes. The person feels hopeless because society and culture are too constraining and kills self in response. Nielsen argues that Stirner adopted his extreme form of individualism as a "religious" response in reaction to the stress and constraints of modernity.

Nielsen says, Stirner finds himself in a quandary because the only options open to the absolute egoist who rejects objective, external forms is either an overly socialized, other-directed form of self that mutates with changing social experiences, or an isolated self that is deluded in its self-importance and independence. For Nielsen, like Durkheim before him, objective social forms provide the space for individuals to develop selves that are not as mutable as those that are detached from it. Although Stirner wants to shatter all external and constraining social facts, he does so only in thought and only in the form of a book. Nielson says, it is not surprising that Stirner did not continue to develop his egoist philosophy; there is simply no where to go with it. Stirner, then, was not a theorist of modernity, he was a victim of it.

Nielsen is interested in a dialectic of “moral experience and cultural expression,” but not concerned with the dialectical structure of Stirner’s thought. He refuses to understand Stirner as a theorist of liberation and self-fulfillment. Beyond the scurrilous effort to equate Stirner with Charles Manson, Nielsen, like many other scholars who have commented on Stirner, does not explore Stirner’s relationship to Hegel nor the Hegelian foundations of his thought.

In contrast, Lawrence Stepelevich is an American philosopher who is probably most responsible for revitalizing interest in Hegel in the United States since the 1970s, which he accomplished in part through the creation of the Hegel Society of America. He is also primarily responsible for establishing in scholarly publications the relationship between Stirner’s thought and that of Hegel. In a series of journal articles in the 1970s and 1980s, Stepelevich sought to refute what he termed the “one-dimensional” characterizations of Stirner presented by academics, anarchists, and Marxists, who, for their own reasons, expressed little interest in Hegel and, thus, neglected to situate Stirner in a Hegelian context. For Stepelevich, Stirner’s writings “bear testimony to this indebtedness to Hegel.” Stirner, “the last of the Hegelians,” sought to advance the Hegelian critical spirit through a more radical or total atheism which rejected all notions of supreme beings or universal essences. Essences such as God, Mankind, State, Society, and Truth are expressions of alienation since they “stand over and against the individual thinker in their hostile demands to be served and worshipped.”<sup>51</sup>

Stirner, who denied essences and focused on the pure consciousness of the ego, may be called the “anti-Hegel,” but he is also the “complete” Hegel because *The Ego and Its Own* completes the study of consciousness that Hegel began in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Stepelevich argues that there are three principles that clearly establish Stirner as a Hegelian and the ultimate outcome of Hegelianism.<sup>52</sup> First, the “path of knowledge” in Hegelianism leads to pure self-consciousness. Stepelevich establishes this principle by first examining Hegel’s purpose in the *Phenomenology* to discover the possibility of absolute knowledge. He then demonstrates that Stirner’s critique of reification or his assault on fixed ideas or the “spooks” of modernity produces the “I,” or the individual who is self-consciously self-determining. Stirner’s unique ego is the embodiment of the Hegelian notion of freedom. Second, not only does the absolute embodiment of self-consciousness generate the “I,” but a unique ego. The phenomenological “we” of Hegel is actualized by Stirner as *Der Einzige*, the unique one. For Stirner, absolute knowledge can exist only within the particular consciousness of the unique one, a self-comprehending and infinite relationship of person to self that is neither solipsistic nor antisocial. Third, the unique one culminates the quest of the *Phenomenology* as a negative

reality that transcends conceptual history. Thus, Stirner's "literary decoration" that he has "founded his affair on nothing" is understood as a "creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything." Stepelevich castigates commentators like Paterson who accuse Stirner of nihilism for misunderstanding his meaning, that the pure subjectivity of nothing is opposed to the abstract objectivity of "thinghood." For Hegel and Stirner, the whole of "actuality" is the interaction or nexus of subjectivity and objectivity. It is Stirner's approach to de-reification; it establishes the indeterminate nature of human behavior and the phenomenological basis of individual freedom.

In some respects, Nielsen's study is a comparative analysis of Stirner, Rimbaud, Johnson, and the Manson family as "horrible workers," and Stepelevich's studies are a comparative analysis of Stirner, Hegel, and the young Hegelians. Saul Newman, a political theorist, has also developed studies of Stirner using a comparative methodology. In a variety of studies, Newman has examined Stirner as a theorist of posthumanist and poststructuralist thought.<sup>53</sup> Newman is particularly interested in Stirner's relationship with anarchist thought and the critique of reification. One of Newman's central arguments is that Stirner's fundamental concern is with the tendency of radical or revolutionary movements to impose new forms of domination once they assume power. Hence, Stirner's relationship with anarchism is complex and tenuous. His critique of Feuerbach and the concept of "Man" or "Humanity" supplanting "God" is precisely an example of this tendency. For Newman, a principal postulate of anarchism is that the human essence is the basis of the need for human humans to be freed from the state. Stirner's critique of Feuerbach renders the entire philosophy of anarchism absurd because it is based on a religious illusion that there is such a thing as a "human essence" that guides or directs human behavior and human needs. Stirner's thought proves to be extremely important to a dialogue between anarchism and the poststructuralist thought of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan. Newman's work is aimed at developing a political philosophy of postanarchism in which Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own* has an important role.

Newman considers Stirner to be a "proto-poststructuralist" thinker since he anticipated by over a century many of the themes that concern poststructuralist and postmodern thinkers. Newman defines poststructuralism as a theoretical strategy that rejects the notion of universal and absolute notions of reason and morality. Politically, it adumbrates the end of the universal rational subject who can act as an autonomous and self-willed agent.<sup>54</sup> Newman is not really interested in Stirner as an independent thinker, but only as he helps solve problems in contemporary political theory. Stirner is important because his critique of reifications or "spooks" anticipates central themes in postmodern and poststructuralist thought, and not because his



unique one exemplifies a concept of the autonomous self-willed agent. His interest in Stirner is the polar opposite of Stepelevich. Newman's work is significant because it emphasizes that Stirner made some major contributions to the analysis and critique of modernity. Newman tends to drop "egoism" and "ownness" out of the analysis of Stirner in favor of more collectivist Marxist and anarchist ideas.

This study, on the contrary, is not concerned with demonstrating comparisons or similarities with more contemporary poststructuralist theorists. It is focused on understanding the direct influence that Stirner had on other writers, much of which is concerned with a critique of the social relations and culture of modernity. Thus, *Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism* can be understood as a contribution to the conception of Stirner as a "proto-post-structuralist" thinker since it tracks the development of his thought through the work of writers in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century.

### INTERPRETING STIRNER AS A CRITIC OF MODERNITY: THE NEXT STEPS

Five conclusions can be drawn from this review of the commentary and scholarly literature on Max Stirner. First, there is a tendency to attribute Stirner's philosophic statement to external reconstructions of his personal experiences, feelings, or "failures" in his life. This is an odd approach for two reasons. Existing information about Stirner's life is rather limited to the few biographical facts that appear in John Henry Mackay's *Max Stirner: His Life and Work*. It is difficult to understand how these writers, none of whom are trained psychotherapists, can arrive at claims of "paranoid schizophrenia" through the extant information about Stirner himself. Also, if the assessments or interpretations of Stirner's thought are to be based in fabrications about his life, should this methodology be extended to other writers? Is it a valid methodology for the understanding of the entirety of social and political thought? If so, what are we to make of the relationship between the "failures" in Marx's life and the insight of his studies? Should the same methodology be used to analyze Nietzsche's psychological problems and his work? Should every analysis of theory be reduced to a psychological profile of theorist? What, then, are the root pathologies that help explain, say, the hostility that Marx, Paterson, and Nielson direct toward Stirner? Psychological reductionism is not the best approach for understanding the theorist.

Second, with the exception of the work of Newman, the literature pays insufficient attention to Stirner as a theorist of modernity and critic of ideology. It is curious that all other commentators, friend and foe alike, skip over Stirner's discussion of modernity or reduce it to the sections that

directly critique Feuerbach. Stirner is frequently criticized for ignoring the specifics of sociohistorical conditions, but this is also peculiar since the first third of *The Ego and Its Own* takes care to describe historical process and the social and cultural dimensions of the modern world.

Third, with the exception of the work of Stepelevich, the literature also pays scant attention to Stirner's Hegelianism and the role of dialectics in his thought. This is perhaps a consequence of Marx's absurd pronouncement that Stirner pretended to abolish dialectics and historical process, and the tendency of contemporary scholars to shy away from challenging Marx. Fortunately, Stepelevich provides an example of scholarship that views Hegelian dialectics as inextricably woven into the fabric of Stirner's thought. Unfortunately, there are many aspects of Stirner's dialectics that have yet to be explored, such as his efforts to situate the unique ego in the context of broader sociohistorical circumstances. Stirner developed a critique of modernity, not a plan for an alternative society.

Fourth, there is also a marked tendency to interpret Stirner through the philosophic lens of anarchism. Marxists, existentialists, and postmodernists alike tend to misinterpret the nature of antistatism in Stirner's thought. Was Stirner an anarchist, and did his philosophy convey anarchism to those who were the most influenced by it? If the answer is an unmitigated "yes," why was Stirner so critical of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon when Proudhon had declared himself an "anarchist" long before 1844? Why has there been such difficulty among historians of anarchism to fit Stirner into the pantheon of anarchist celebrities? These questions are important and will receive attention in the chapters that follow. Stirner, like Michel Foucault, was clearly antistatist, but his thought has a more complex relationship with anarchism than the Marxists, anarchists, and postmodernists would like to admit. The corollary to this point is that there is an underemphasis on Stirner's concept of ownness. Typically, "ownness" is interpreted by commentators, such as Clark, as Stirner's idiosyncratic view of freedom or, in the case of Paterson, as his maliciously nihilistic version of narrow self-interest. "Ownness" has not been interpreted as the core of Stirner's critique of the state, society, and history.

Finally, the literature on Stirner directs very little attention to his influence on other theorists and activists. When it occurs, it is usually limited to uncritical discussions of Stirner's influence on Benjamin Tucker. An important illustration of this point is James J. Martin's account in *Men Against the State*, which identifies Tucker's interest in Stirner, but does not explore it.<sup>55</sup> Typically, the little discussion there is about Stirner's influence points to his contributions to individualist anarchism, and it almost universally ignores the role of ownness and dialectics in his thought.

If the existing scholarship on Stirner and the impact of his thought fails to fully capture the significance of his critique of modernity, an important

question arises concerning the type of approach or methodology can help illuminate his dialectical egoist critique. Stirner's major critics have approached his thought from ideological perspectives that were either statist, collectivist, or religious, or some combination of those tendencies. Each of these entailed a tragic sense of life, envisioning individual thought and behavior to be eternally subordinate to some form of external authority. Each of these finds Stirner's life-affirming egoism troublesome and threatening. It is time to explore what other egoists have to offer to our understanding of Stirner and his interest in the reconstruction of social life without the fixed, external mediation of human behavior. It is necessary to expand the field of vision to find theoretical perspectives that are more receptive to a political philosophy based on both egoism and dialectics.

## NOTES

1. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (1844; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). The original German title of Stirner's book is *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. Some scholars suggest that a more appropriate translation of the title is *The Unique One and His Property*. This may be a better rendering of Stirner's intent than *The Ego and Its Own*, but I will use the title of the Cambridge University Press version of the fine translation by Steven T. Byington. The translated title, *The Ego and His Own*, was actually selected by Benjamin R. Tucker, who originally published Byington's translation in 1907. The version published by Cambridge University Press makes the title gender-neutral. I will use the Cambridge version because I address an English-speaking audience that likely associates Tucker's choice of titles with Stirner's book. Stirner's meaning is clear regardless of any controversy over the English title.

2. See Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (1907; repr., Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 162, and George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (1905; repr., Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, 2010), 137–60. Discussion of the perspectives of Buber, Camus, Read, and Löwith on Stirner appear in subsequent sections of this chapter.

3. The characterization of *The Ego and Its Own* as the "most revolutionary book ever written" comes from James Huneker, *Egoists: A Book of Supermen* (1909; repr., New York: Scribner, 1921), 350–72. See Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 55–74, for an example of a scholarly examination of Stirner that appreciates his relevance to the study of modernity and postmodern thought. For examples of Web projects devoted to organizing and promoting the entirety of Stirner's writings see [www.lsr-projekt.de/poly/enintro.html](http://www.lsr-projekt.de/poly/enintro.html) and <http://i-studies.com/>.

4. Read commented on his struggle with Stirner in *The Tenth Muse* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 74–82, and in *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

5. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1932; repr., Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998); Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, November 19, 1844,

available online at [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/letters/44\\_11\\_19.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/letters/44_11_19.htm) (accessed May 20, 2009). Engels's letter to Marx dated January 8, 1845, makes it clear that Marx responded to Engels's initial comments on Stirner. The archives of the collected works of Marx and Engels indicate that this letter was never recovered. See Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, January 8, 1845, available online at [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/letters/45\\_01\\_20.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/letters/45_01_20.htm) (accessed May 20, 2009).

6. John Henry Mackay, *Max Stirner: His Life and His Work* (1897; repr., Concord, CA: Preemptory Publications, 2005).

7. Mackay, *Max Stirner*, 33.

8. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004).

9. Edgar Bauer to Max Hildebrandt, 1882, available online at [www.nonserviam.com/egoistarchive/stirner/articles/Step\\_StirnerAndSeliga2.htm](http://www.nonserviam.com/egoistarchive/stirner/articles/Step_StirnerAndSeliga2.htm) (accessed April 30, 2010).

10. Engels's poem appears online at [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/cantos/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/cantos/index.htm) (accessed April 30, 2010).

11. Mackay, *Max Stirner*, 186–88.

12. Background on Bauer's *Trumpet* appears in Lawrence Stepelevich, "Translator's Introduction," *Nonserviam* 24 (2010): 4–7. Stirner's essay appears in English as Max Stirner, "On Bruno Bauer's *Trumpet of Last Judgment*," *Nonserviam* 24 (2010): 7–14.

13. Stirner, "*Trumpet*," 9.

14. Max Stirner, *The False Principle of Our Education, or Humanism and Realism* (1842; repr., Colorado Springs, CO: Ralph Myles, 1967).

15. Max Stirner, "Art and Religion," in *The Young Hegelians*, ed. Lawrence Stepelevich (1842; repr., Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 327–34.

16. Stirner's essay on the "Liebestaat" originally appeared in Max Stirner, *Max Stirner's Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes: Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum* (Berlin: John Henry Mackay, 1898). It is discussed in Mackay, *Max Stirner*, 111.

17. Mackay, *Max Stirner*, 126–28.

18. Edgar Bauer to Max Hildebrandt, 1882.

19. An English translation of Feuerbach's comments appears in Ludwig Feuerbach, "*The Essence of Christianity in Relation to The Ego and Its Own*," *The Philosophical Forum* 8, nos. 2–4 (1978): 81–91.

20. Hess's essay appears as Moses Hess, "The Recent Philosophers," in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Stepelevich (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999): 359–75.

21. A lengthy excerpt from Schmidt's book appears in English as Karl Schmidt, *The Individual*, trans. Eric von der Luft (North Syracuse, NY: Gegensatz Press, 2009). The section pertaining to Schmidt's critique of Stirner appears on pages 82–101.

22. Schmidt, *The Individual*, 86.

23. Max Stirner, "Stirner's Critics," *The Philosophical Forum* 8, nos. 2–4 (1978): 66–80.

24. Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, November 19, 1844, and Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*. Sidney Hook has a summary of Marx's critique of Stirner in *From Hegel to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 163–85.

25. Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, November 19, 1844.

26. See note 5 above and also see Engels's letter to Marx dated January 8, 1845, available online at [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/letters/45\\_01\\_20.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/letters/45_01_20.htm) (accessed May 20, 2009).

27. Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (1948; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Warren Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*; and David McClelland, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (New York: Praeger, 1969). These discussions of Marx and the Young Hegelians promote the idea that Marxism is the inevitable, logical outcome of the development of Hegelian philosophy. Philosophy, understood as the study of consciousness, presumably ended with the Young Hegelians. Marx's great achievement, the argument goes, is that he superseded the work of the philosophers by combining a political praxis with a materialist focus on the facts of history and society. Nevertheless, these discussions about the relationship between Marx, Stirner, and the Young Hegelians display a weak understanding of Stirner by failing to include a discussion of his critique of modernity and his approach to dialectics. The argument that Stirner was concerned with only consciousness, and not material social and historical realities, is absurd.

28. Marx reveals that the manuscript the Soviets published as *The German Ideology* was rejected for publication at least once in a letter to Engels dated May 7, 1867. The letter appears in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 42 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 3. Given the presumed profundity of *The German Ideology*, it is interesting that, after the manuscript was rejected in the mid-1840s, Marx and Engels never went back to it, but left it to the "gnawing criticism of rodents," as cited in Francis Whelan, *Karl Marx: A Life* (New York: Norton and Company, 1999), 9. If the manuscript was so important, why not continue to seek its publication? For an especially exuberant assessment of *The German Ideology* see the preface that appears in the Stalinist version published in the Soviet Union. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 3–12.

29. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. Lloyd Easton and Kurt Guddat (1844; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 216–48; Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"* (1843; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1844; repr., Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988).

A wonderful example of Marx's method appears in the first few pages of the essay "Estranged Labor" in the *Manuscripts of 1844*, 69–71. Marx indicates that his theory of alienated labor is based upon the premises of political economy "in its own words" through an exposition of the wages of labor, the profit of capital, and the rent of land. Marx then proceeds to an analysis of "actual economic fact," or the ideas of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and J. B. Say as they are situated in the real world. The discussion of alienation is from start to finish a form of immanent critique. Marx does not proceed in the same manner with his critique of Stirner. Nowhere in *The German Ideology*, do Marx and Engels discuss the task Stirner sets out for himself "in his own words." Marx and Engels extract quotes from *The Ego*

and *Its Own*, but these largely appear as straw men to be attacked in isolation from each other and from the entire text of Stirner's book. It is one thing to reference individual statements from a theoretical discussion, it is quite another thing to consider the meaning the statements comprise.

30. Nearly every page of *The German Ideology* that concerns Stirner seethes with disdain toward his "bourgeois outlook" and "spiritual" attitude. Marx and Engels have considerable trouble separating their hatred of Stirner from the arguments they have with *The Ego and Its Own*. Thus, the ridicule they heap upon Stirner, such as referring to him variously as Saint Max, Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, and Saint Sancho, appears to substitute for arguments against his thought.

31. See Robert J. Antonio, ed., *Marx and Modernity: Key Readings and Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 1–50. Also see Berlin's gushing assessment in *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, 111–16. Berlin may be demonstrating weak judgment in his enthusiastic assessment of the impact of Marx's thought in light of the horrible human rights record of the societies and governments devoted to Marx's cause. Although he intends it as a compliment to Stirner, Berlin is mistaken in his claim that Stirner's thought "had a great influence on Nietzsche and probably Bakunin (perhaps because it anticipated Marx's own economic theory of alienation too precisely)." He cites no evidence that Stirner influenced either Nietzsche or Bakunin. Chapter 7 in this book addresses the hypothesis that Stirner had a profound influence on Nietzsche. It is highly unlikely that Bakunin was significantly influenced in any significant way by Stirner. Despite his hatred of Marx and the political organizations promoted by socialists and communists, Bakunin was a garden variety nationalist and collectivist, positions that Stirner abhorred.

32. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread* (1844; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

33. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (1947; repr., New York: Routledge, 2002), and Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952).

34. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956).

35. Camus, *The Rebel*, 63–65.

36. Read, *The Tenth Muse*, 76.

37. Read, *The Tenth Muse*, 80–81; see also Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 46–98.

38. Read, *The Tenth Muse*, 81.

39. Paul Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists: Ideas and Teachings of Seven Major Thinkers* (1908; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

40. Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists*, 103, 107.

41. George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (1962; repr., Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1970).

42. Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 97.

43. John Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism* (London: Freedom Press, 1971), 9.

44. Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism*, 61.

45. Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism*, 61–69.

46. Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press): 1964.

47. Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 358.

48. W. K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist Max Stirner* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), ix, 18.

49. For a solid, point by point refutation of Paterson, see Larry Alan Schiereck, "Max Stirner's Egoism and Nihilism" (master's thesis, San Diego State University, 1981).

50. Donald Nielsen, *Horrible Workers: Max Stirner, Arthur Rimbaud, Robert Johnson, and the Charles Manson Circle* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), v, 13–26.

51. Lawrence Stepelevich, "The Revival of Max Stirner," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 2 (April–June 1974): 323–28; "Max Stirner and Ludwig Feuerbach," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no. 3 (July–September 1978): 451–63; "Max Stirner as Hegelian," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 4 (October–December 1985): 597–614. For a perspective that Stirner made a sharper break from Hegel see Widukind De Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel, and the Young Hegelians: A Reassessment," *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 3 (September 2008): 285–97.

52. Stepelevich, "Stirner as Hegelian," 608–10.

53. See Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan and Unstable Universalities: Post-structuralism and Radical Politics* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007).

54. Saul Newman, *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3–4.

55. James J. Martin, *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827–1908* (Colorado Springs, CO: Ralph Myles, 1970), 249–61.

## 2



# Humanity — the New Supreme Being: Stirner's Summation and Critique of Modernity

### THE HEGELIAN CONTEXT: READING STIRNER AS A DIALECTICAL EGOIST

This chapter provides an overview of Stirner's discussion of the rise of modernity, the problems it presents, and opportunities for a philosophic and practical break from it. The chapter (a) discusses the ideas Stirner presents in the preface and the first part of *The Ego and Its Own*, (b) outlines the basic elements of dialectical egoism as a body of ideas, and (c) sets the stage for his critique of modernity. The first part of *The Ego and Its Own* culminates in Stirner's argument that the humanism or "humane liberalism" of modernity destroyed the old gods, but created a new supreme being: "Man."

*The Ego and Its Own* is organized into three major sections. The first section is a brief preface titled, "All Things Are Nothing to Me." The preface is followed by a lengthy section titled, "First Part—Man." The first part comprises two chapters. The first of these is a short chapter titled "A human life," which discusses, at the level of the individual, the processes of developing critical thought and an egoist view of the world. The second chapter in the first part is titled, "The Men of the Old Times and the New." This chapter includes Stirner's discussion of the transition from antiquity to modernity, and the social and philosophic tensions within the modern world. The first section of this chapter discusses the organization of *The Ego and Its Own*, and some basic points that are helpful in understanding Stirner as a dialectical egoist theorist of modernity.



The second part comprises three chapters. The first is a description of his concept of "ownness." The second is a description of "the owner," or those dynamics of history, persons, and ideas that challenge the domination of individuals by "causes" and the ideologies that support them. The third chapter describes "the unique one," the notion that persons are unique and cannot be reduced to the categories imposed by collectivist movements and philosophies, without seriously damaging them as persons. The final chapter is a glimpse of the person who emancipates self from movements and philosophies that externalize and alienate thoughts and behavior. The crux of the second part of *The Ego and Its Own* is Stirner's viewpoint on the transcendence of modernity. The following is a discussion of the preface and the first part of *The Ego and Its Own*.

The preface of *The Ego and Its Own* is a bold introduction to Stirner's book. It poses a provocative thesis: Individuals are confronted by a multitude of political ideologies and movements that demand the allegiance and submission of the person to their values, perspectives, and interests. The individual's claim that she or he also has values, perspectives, and interests that deserve recognition is derided as "egoism."<sup>1</sup> Individuals are continually bombarded with external claims on their loyalty, allegiance, labor, money, safety, well-being, and lives that are seen as appropriate and legitimate. When individuals reject those external claims, they are attacked as selfish and morally inferior. The self-interests, avarice, and needs of the collective are ubiquitously defined as "patriotism" and "humanism," but the interests, avarice, and needs of the person are defined as "egoism." Stirner begins with the assertion that the person's values, perspectives, and interests are more important than the assertions and demands by the external agents or "causes." He vows to fight external demands and redefine his life as his own cause.

Stirner's signature slogans, "I have founded my affair on nothing!" and "Nothing is more to me than myself!" are actually translations of, and clear references to, lines in Goethe's 1806 poem "Vanitas! Vanitatum Vanitas!" Goethe's poem became a drinking song in the early nineteenth century. The first lines in "Vanitas!" have been translated as,

My thoughts and oughts are nothing fixed!  
For joy's the world that's downed unmixed!

The narrator sings about his adventures searching for meaning and fulfillment through avarice, sexual conquests, wanderlust, fame, and military glory, only to find disappointment and emptiness at the achievement of each. Far from despairing, the narrator joyfully anticipates the closing statement in the preface and the last line in Stirner's book, "Nothing is more to me than myself!"

So now I call my calling naught!  
The world's all mine that comes unsought!<sup>2</sup>

Stirner's reference to Goethe's poem is not a capitulation to nihilistic despair, but an affirmation that individual fulfillment cannot be found in external causes where meaning, values, and ideals are imposed on the person. Fulfillment can only be found in actions that have meaning freely assigned by the person. Goethe's poem is a rousing and raucous critique of "fixed ideas" or obsessions that persons believe will bring them happiness. Fixed ideas only bring disappointment and frustration. The poem states that meaning, fulfillment, and happiness are more likely to be found in more mundane activities like sharing a meal and drink with friends.

Stirner's preface specifically addresses the demands and claims of (a) religion, which is the cause that promotes the interests of God and his human surrogates, and (b) humanism, which is the cause that promotes the interests of "Mankind" and those who purport to represent it. But where is the "cause" that promotes the autonomy, freedom, and dignity of the individual? Such a cause does not exist, except for that which individuals are able to create for themselves. Such a cause is universally discredited and reviled as "egoism" because the external and collectivist causes that demand the allegiance and submission of the person recognize the threat it presents to their power and interests. The purpose of external causes, such as god and mankind, is to eliminate the self as a competing cause or an alternative source of allegiance. The practice of external causes is to extend their control by ensuring that individuals subordinate their values, meanings, and "concerns" to an allegiance to god, humanity, or some political ideology.

Stirner's egoism, on the other hand, is an assertion that individuals are the source of creation, or the assignment of meaning and allegiance, and, thus, can legitimately base their thoughts and behavior on their own "concern." "Nothing is more to me than myself" is the expression of Stirner's egoist rebellion against claims that external causes are the legitimate owners of the thought and behavior of the person. The basic question of the egoist challenge to external causes is: why should the by-products of human interaction acquire more importance than the individuals who created them? Are social organizations the masters or the servants of persons? Stirner's preface is a radical individualist deconstruction of the ideological claims that external causes espouse for the allegiance and subordination of the person. It demonstrates that the person is ultimately responsible for assigning meaning to causes or social movements and can legitimately assign meaning to his or her choices.

The preface is important to *The Ego and Its Own* because Stirner begins to articulate his view of alienation and the power that ideologies and so-

cial movements have over the individual. His preface is an initial effort to deconstruct the ideological claims of social movements for the allegiance and submission of individuals. Stirner articulates this theme as the recurrent message throughout the book. The last paragraphs of *The Ego and Its Own* return to the statement that "all things are nothing to me."

Commentators such as Löwith and Paterson interpret Stirner's signature slogan in the preface as evidence of his nihilism and solipsism.<sup>3</sup> This is a misrepresentation of Stirner that is based on the studied avoidance of his discussion in both the preface and core of the book. Stirner does not deny the existence of external causes. He denies their legitimacy. He rejects the claim that external causes are the absolute source of meaning and allegiance. He rejects the claim that external causes are everything and that the person is nothing. The person is the "creative nothing" that is the source of meaning, purpose, and allegiance. The person can withdraw meaning, purpose, and allegiance from the external cause. While this does not mean that the external cause disappears into "nothingness," it does mean that the person can become his or her own cause.

External, institutionalized causes are "nothing" because the egoist rejects the claim that social movements and organizations have the sole right to structure the person's thought and behavior. *The Ego and Its Own* is in many respects an historical and philosophical articulation of the theme found in its preface. The book is a critique of organized and institutionalized "causes" that claim to be everything, relegating the person to "nothingness." The philosophy that Stirner propounds in *The Ego and Its Own* is unabashedly egoist, but it is unlike the nominalist and atomist forms of egoism that appear in the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and Jeremy Bentham. Stirner's philosophy is a form of Hegelianism that explores the implications of the notion of the "free, thinking subject" at its absolute limits. Taking Hegel's argument that the purpose of philosophy is to promote human freedom more seriously than Hegel or his other students. The recognition that Stirner's egoism is either a form of Hegelianism or a derivative of it has several important implications for the reading of *The Ego and Its Own*.

*The Ego and Its Own* is replete with Hegelian concepts and problematics: the universal and particular, the objective and subjective, lordship and bondage, the "in-itself" and the "for-itself, and the potential and actual. Stirner's rhetoric exudes concepts and ideas that are rooted in Hegel's work, particularly from the *Philosophy of History*, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and *Science of Logic*.<sup>4</sup> Stirner not only adopts facets of Hegel's view of history, he organizes *The Ego and Its Own* after the structure of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*. He builds a philosophic edifice that culminates in a concept that encapsulates the body of thought that precedes it. For Hegel, this was the "absolute idea." For Stirner, it is the

“unique ego.” Like Hegel, Stirner is primarily concerned with the problem of alienation as it pertains to the person’s alienation from self, but he attacks other forms of alienation as well. He speaks eloquently and analytically about the person experiencing self as an “otherness,” coerced to accept values and “causes” that serve external, abstract masters. He discusses the degradation of the person as an “egoist” as she or he attempts to assert self as an autonomous, unique, objective being.

Stirner is also an astute analyst of reification, or the process in which social and cultural products are conferred an autonomous existence and acquire the power to subordinate individuals. Stirner is especially interested in the dynamics through which ideologies acquire a determinant status in society and in the everyday lives of individuals. *The Ego and Its Own* includes a lengthy critique of “the uncanny,” “spooks,” “ghosts,” and “specters,” which originally emerge from the creative activities of human beings, but acquire an institutionalized, independent, material existence backed by political, economic, and religious power. Stirner’s egoism is a critical philosophy that undermines the reified, objective, material status that ideologies acquire in favor of the free and unconstrained choices made by persons as they live their lives. It promotes human liberation through an attack on ideological constructions that control individual thought and behavior through manipulation and coercion.

*The Ego and Its Own* is a direct response to the interpretations of Hegelianism by Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Moses Hess, and the radical left in Germany in the 1840s. Stirner was convinced that the critical philosophy prevailing at the time legitimated new forms of oppression and alienation. The humanist writings of Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer were particularly important stimuli for Stirner’s work because he believed that they created new justifications for domination, rather than providing a break from them. Feuerbach published his most renowned work, *The Essence of Christianity*, in 1841. *The Essence of Christianity* outlined the contradictions and illusory interpretation of religion and history in Hegel’s philosophy. Feuerbach promoted a “new philosophy” based on a radical critique of religion and a humanist or anthropological interpretation of human experience.<sup>5</sup> Feuerbach and Bauer argued that religious or mythological thought has a human foundation in that it projects human qualities onto the objective world, and then converts those qualities into an active subject. All gods have a human, not divine, origin. Religion objectifies humanity’s essence in an ideal form. Human knowledge about God is nothing but humanity’s knowledge of its own ideal qualities. Religious consciousness, therefore, is really alienated knowledge about humans that must be returned to them. The purpose of philosophy is to return the knowledge that humanity is the subject, not the object, of its own creations, including its knowledge about god. Feuerbach believed that the

human tendency to externalize and objectify its ideal qualities in religion could be used to promote prosperity and community on earth. In the humanism of Feuerbach and Bauer, "man" became the god of the modern world. The more politically oriented Hegelian radicals, such as Moses Hess, Arnold Ruge, Marx, Engels, and Mikhail Bakunin appropriated the arguments of the humanists, applied them to the analysis of class inequality. Each concluded that communism, or socialized humanity, was the means to create the humanist paradise. *The Ego and Its Own* ridicules these notions, but it is tied to the philosophic discourse of the period.

In his critique of Feuerbach and the young Hegelians, Stirner does more than adopt the rhetoric of Hegelianism. He also adopts the dialectic as a method of argumentation. He does not use the thesis-antithesis-synthesis waltz that is frequently but erroneously thought to be the formula for the Hegelian dialectic. Stirner consistently discusses the conflicts, tensions, and contradictions within social formations and ideologies as a means of understanding their instability and tendency to change into a new form, or a "higher presupposition." *The Ego and Its Own* focuses on the transcendence of social formations by newer forms that both negate their predecessors and carry with them emergent conflicts, tensions, and contradictions. Stirner is masterful at the use of *immanent critique*, a dialectical method that contrasts what a social formation or ideology purports to be and what it is or what it is becoming in the historical process. He also practices a type of *transcendental critique*, which opposes the content of a social formation or ideologies with a standard or principle.<sup>6</sup> In Stirner's case, social formations and ideologies are often contrasted with the qualities of the unique ego, his interpretation of the "free, thinking subject," the phenomenological goal of the Hegelian system.

Additional evidence that Stirner's egoism is firmly entrenched in, or related to, the Hegelian system is found in his use of the concept of "spirit," or "*geist*." For Hegel, Feuerbach, and the young Hegelians, the concept of "spirit" has meaning that goes far beyond its religious connotations. Spirit refers to an essence, or the basic elements of thought in a philosophy or a concept. At a more macrolevel, it also refers to the qualities that define or characterize a nation or an historical period. Hegelians frequently refer to *Weltgeist*, the thought or spirit of the world or an empire that has global reach, and *Zeitgeist*, the thought or spirit of an historical period. For Stirner, concepts like spirit and essence morph into reifications far too easily, especially in the humanist writings of Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer, both of whom saw "Man" as the "higher presupposition" to replace "God." Stirner was very critical of the tendency of Feuerbach and the young Hegelians to speak of spirit and essence as real or material entities, and not just concepts created by intellectuals and theologians. For Stirner, spirits and essences are an "otherness" and alien.

They are simply the spooks or ghosts that the “modern men,” including the liberals, socialists, and humanists of modern times, employ to promote their political and ideological agendas. Spirits and essences are ghostly, uncanny spooks that estrange persons from their own perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors. They elevate ideas to a status above the corporeal world, promoting uncritical acquiescence to authoritarian and collectivist movements and institutions.<sup>7</sup>

Stirner’s dialectical approach to modernity includes his practice of shifting levels of analysis to provide a view of phenomena in their full context. Stirner’s summation and critique of modernity includes three distinct levels of analysis. At the first level, Stirner provides summaries of the conflicts and contradictions in political economy. Following Hegel’s philosophy of history, Stirner is particularly interested in the characteristics of “world historical” societies or empires. He describes the political economies of such nations and how their “spirit” is promoted and enforced by ruling elites to discipline their populace. When he is focused on the political economy at the level of entire societies, Stirner speaks of social relations as social facts that have an external and constraining character to them. Generally, this appears as a consequence of the political and economic power that societal elites obtain.

At the second level, Stirner focuses at a more intermediate level of social analysis that includes language, culture, and ideology. His critique of “spirit” is not just a rejection of religious abstractions, but an assault on all forms of thought, philosophy, and ideology that distort communication, alienate the creations of human beings, and attempt to place persons in a subordinate role to cultural creations.<sup>8</sup> Much of his analysis of modernity is concerned with the process of how radical or revolutionary philosophies and ideologies turn into their opposite: they begin as philosophies of freedom, but create new fixed ideas and, thus, new forms of enslavement.

At the third level, Stirner directs his attention to individuals and their interactions in everyday life. He is very interested in how persons contribute to their own subordination as well as how they emancipate themselves from alienated and oppressive environments. Stirner’s egoist critique is thoroughly dialectical because it consistently places the phenomena under his microscope into a broader context. While not stated with the same formality apparent in contemporary social science, Stirner employs a multilevel analysis that enables him to shift perspectives from societal politics and economics, to culture and ideology, and to individual cognition and interaction in everyday life. Stirner’s egoism in *The Ego and Its Own* is a sophisticated and multitiered form of dialectical analysis.

*The Ego and Its Own* critiques the politics, economics, culture, and ideology of modernity. It is primarily concerned with the direct and indirect forms of constraint persons encounter in everyday life. It is also a brash

defense of individual liberty and self-ownership. Stirner is ruthless in his attacks on the aspects of social and philosophic systems that alienate and reify the products of human creativity, and subordinate persons to external interests. Stirner's egoism must be differentiated from other forms of psychological and ethical egoism. He does not argue that all human behavior is driven by selfish, egoistic impulses, although he criticizes ideologies that denigrate selfish choices by persons. He also does not create nor argue for an ethical system based on purely egoistic or selfish choices. His use of "egoism," especially in the first part of the book, has little to do with the creation of a philosophic position. Instead, he uses "egoism" as more of a standard for individual resistance to "causes" and institutions that demand allegiance and subordination. Stirner frequently refers to "egoism" as though it is the straw man that social movements and ideologies use to discredit persons who refuse to accept the dictates of religious, ethical or political strictures. "Causes" frequently attack recalcitrant individuals who will not accept domination without a fight as "egoists" who think only of themselves and not of "loftier" goals, such as the collective good. "Egoism" is a term of derision that social movements, organizations, and ideologies use to discredit opponents.

For Stirner, egoism has a political meaning: it is a refusal or a rejection of demands that the person surrender his or her judgment and loyalty to an external cause. He gleefully adopts the term to mock the derision of movements and ideologies that promote the sacrifice of individuals. Stirner speaks in *The Ego and Its Own* in the first person frequently, but not exclusively. The "egoism" in his rhetoric must also be understood from the same political vantage point. The "I" in *The Ego and Its Own* is usually not a reference to the individual Max Stirner, but to an individual-centered perspective on the world. The "I" in *The Ego and Its Own* is a type of phenomenological standpoint that is concerned with person's experience and resistance to religious mystification and political domination. It is a reference to how persons, as unique beings who cannot be reduced to externally imposed collectivist abstractions, experience the world they inhabit and help create.<sup>9</sup>

Dialectical egoism is a body of ideas with identifiable concepts and propositions about politics, culture, and individuality. It is a dialectical methodology that includes observations and interpretations of conflicts and contradictions within a structured, multilayered social totality. Stirner's dialectical approach is sensitive to the interaction of individuals in the social environment in which they find themselves. He recognizes that individuals and the external world affect each other. He is very concerned about the power that movements and organizations have to distort how persons experience themselves and each other. He acknowledges that these external causes frequently possess the physical power needed to

exploit and dominate individuals.<sup>10</sup> He nowhere expresses the belief that persons are completely helpless to defend themselves or unable to resist the facets of modernity that seek their submission. Persons have considerable resources and motivation to resist and undermine those movements and organizations that seek their enslavement. The ability to resist, and the aspiration for individual freedom, are sources of resistance and conflict. They are also the engines for change and historical process. An understanding of Stirner's summation and critique of modernity is dependent upon an understanding of his view of historical process, particularly the transition from antiquity to modernity.

### HISTORY AND DIALECTIC: FROM ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY

The longest section of the first part of *The Ego and Its Own* discusses Stirner's notion of historical process and the rise of modernity. He is particularly interested in the (a) distinction between antiquity and modernity, (b) transition from antiquity to modernity, and (c) nature of modernity and modernist thought. Stirner's historical dialectic is similar to Hegel's in that it includes a conception that societies pass from one form to another that is qualitatively different as a result of conflicts between major social and ideological forces. Some of these conflicts have such significance for humanity that they produce a new "world historical" social formation with a corresponding "Weltgeist" or global perspective. A new societal form is a "higher presupposition" than the previous sociohistorical formation, subsuming and transcending the old. Stirner introduces his Hegelian methodology in *The Ego and Its Own* by opening his analysis with a section that contrasts the culture and ideology of "the ancients and the moderns." In this discussion, he outlines the stages of historical development that were used by historians and philosophers at the time to understand the fundamental dynamics of sociocultural development. It was common practice since the Enlightenment to understand history as a series of stages based on the *spirit* or culture and ideology of a city-state, nation, or continent, such as Rome, Greece, China, and Africa.

Stirner draws much of his discussion of historical process from Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, a series of lectures which were originally delivered during the 1820s.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of his discussion of the ancients and the moderns is not to reproduce Hegel's formulations of sociohistorical development. Stirner is more interested in developing a *critique* of this type of analysis, especially the image that "moderns" have of themselves as the apex of historical development. He attacks the idea that the moderns are spiritually, culturally, and politically superior to the "ancients." The pri-



mary purpose of Stirner's discussion of historical process sets the stage for his critique of modernity, which is a rejection of the modernist deification of "Man" or "Humanity." It also articulates his alternative concepts of dialectical egoism: ownness, the unique one, and the union of egoists. Stirner's critique does not elevate, validate, or sanctify one culture or historical period over others. He describes and critiques each period as their characteristics and practices depart from the notion of the individual who is free of both internal and external constraints. All cultures, nations, and historical periods are subject to his critique of fixed ideas and social processes that alienate the individual from self. The fixed ideas of all socio-historical formations are antithetical to the unique ego.

In the case of the Hegelians, socialists, and communists, the discussion of the stages of historical process had the effect of elevating the present over the past. Some of these formulations drew parallels between societal development and individual development, following social evolution from childhood to maturity. Or, they argued that one historical period positioned a particular social class for societal leadership and control. These schemas of historical change usually entailed the idea that any one historical period was superior to its predecessors. Consequently, a hierarchy of historical periods was either explicitly stated or implicit in the analysis. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* traces societal development through distinct historical periods that include the Oriental, the Greek, the Roman, and the Christian. In Hegel's studies, historical development culminates in the culture and politics of the Christian-Germanic civilization, with the Prussian state presented as the realization of freedom, right, and justice on earth. For Hegel, "Only that which is an object of freedom may be called an Idea." The principle driving social change in Hegelian thought is progress "of the consciousness of freedom" and the actualization of freedom on earth.<sup>12</sup> The true content of history is the "realization of the self-consciousness of freedom." The purpose of the study of history is to recognize that the replacement of one social form by another is progress toward the realization of freedom.

The historical schematic that Stirner discusses in the first part of *The Ego and Its Own* includes several broad, pre-Christian historical periods describing the ancients. It approximates Hegel's characterization in the *Philosophy of History*. Stirner begins his discussion with the disclaimer that he does not believe that the idea about "hierarchy" in historical development is sound. He describes a schema of the historical development of human thought because it "may contribute towards making the rest clear." Far from echoing Hegel, he paves the way for the unique ego and the union of egoists as the concrete alternative to modernity.

Stirner says very little about the cultural dynamics of the early period of antiquity, except that it represents the preeminence of the cultures of

Egypt and North Africa. The early period of antiquity represents a time of dependence of humans on nature and the collectivity, particularly in spirit, culture, and ideology. Stirner describes the differentiation of the “me” and the “not-me” as the basic challenge that individuals confront in the social systems of antiquity. His interest is in how the sense of self developed historically as an entity that is autonomous from both God and the social collectivity. In the initial period of human development, the value of “me” is diminished as the “not-me” of nature and the objective world is too indomitable and immovable to be consumed and absorbed, or effectively challenged, by the “me.” In antiquity, individuals are profoundly dependent on the external world, including nature and the social collectivity, both materially and symbolically. The autonomy and resistance of individuals to culture, society, and authority is difficult in an historical context in which nature dominates survival and social life. In antiquity, the “I” bows to the “truth of the world, mundane relations, and the natural ties of blood.”<sup>13</sup>

As Stirner’s analysis shifts to later periods of antiquity, including the ascendancy of the Greek and Roman cultures, he focuses on the dominance, permanence, and immovability of institutionalized patterns of thought and behavior. Individuals in these cultures begin to differentiate themselves from others and nature, but social institutions promote and enforce habitual, routine, and uncritical behaviors. In the later periods of pre-Christianity, such as the Greek city-states and the Roman empire, conformity, and compliance are the critical cultural values. They are the primary expectations for individual behavior. In the realms of religion, culture, and ideology, this historical period elevated “moral habituation,” or the subordination of individual thought to faith and morality, above individual judgment, innovation, and change. Moral habituation has many functions for social control and organization. Paramount among these is the ideological function of validating the existence of a supreme being who is the gatekeeper of entry into heaven upon death. Stirner argues that one of the major accomplishments of late antiquity is the creation of the concept of heaven. Heaven provides the individual in an alienated environment with a fantasy in which “nothing alien regulates and rules him any longer.” The person’s negation by society, alienation from others, and combat against the world ends in heaven. Heaven is the place of the free enjoyment of self. Stirner maintains that the social and cultural changes within the latter period of antiquity only reformed and ameliorated the domination of the individual by nature and the collective. They did not annihilate the prevailing societal and cultural patterns of antiquity. As Stirner puts it, “[t]he substance, the object, remains.” Human beings now have a heaven or a world of spirits, ghosts, and specters, separate from the material world, to find solace, freedom, and fulfillment.

Everyday life in antiquity was characterized by the domination of individuals and societies by nature, or the harsh, material, physical realities of the world. But everyday life was supported by a spiritual world that offered a respite from nature. The conflict between the practical necessity of extracting food, clothing, and shelter from nature, and the nether world of spirits, ghosts, and specters, was replicated in philosophic and religious discourse. Stirner argues that the antagonism between the practical-orientation of humanity's interaction with nature, and the fantasy inherent in its interaction with spirits and the heavens, was expressed in the conflict between the Sophists and Socrates. Both the Sophists and Socrates undermined the domination of society and individuality by the folk spirit, or ideology, of Greek culture. The Sophists offered ideas and teachings that had practical significance as persons attempted to meet their material needs, or pursue their particular goals and interests. The Sophists were masters of dialectic or argumentative thought that challenged the prevailing objectivity of Greek culture. They taught the ability to effectively pursue one's particular goals and interests in everyday commerce. Even their aphorism, "Man is the measure of all things" affirms a type of particularity or individuality. It is a notion that right is merely the ability of the person to meet his or her needs in a materialist and competitive environment.

Socrates is significant in historical dialectic because he founded ethics in opposition to the sensual, materialist, realist, and practice-oriented philosophy of the Sophists. The Socratic dialectic helped lay the foundation for the transition from antiquity to modernity. For Socrates, it was not sufficient for individuals to pursue commerce, enjoy life, and free themselves from the constraints of nature. Part of what it means to be human, from a Socratic perspective, is to temper or direct individual or particular interests with a concern for the "true," the "good," and the "just." Persons must be "pure hearted." While the Sophists cultivated the understanding, Socrates wanted to cultivate the heart. Persons must examine their motivations and choose to serve the "good cause," not merely their self-interests. Life, without ethics, lacks value and is not worth living from the perspective of living a fully human life. Hegel thought Socrates was subversive of antiquity because he promoted individual judgment against tradition and prejudice. Socrates certainly threatened social order and political authority because he encouraged his students to challenge the objectivity of received wisdom with subjective reflection on "the good" and other transcendent concepts.

Stirner agrees with Hegel that Socrates subverts antiquity, but for a different reason. In his conflict with the Sophists, Socrates insisted that individuals serve the "good cause," that they subordinate themselves to a transcendent idea, or, using Stirner's word, a "specter." Socrates helped

undermine antiquity because he destroyed the separation between the material and spiritual worlds. The material world must be subordinate to the spiritual world. Ethics, or a commitment to “the good,” must direct the behavior of individuals. Socrates was a powerful historical champion of redirecting the motivation of individuals toward transcendent ideas, such as “justice,” and away from particular, subjective pursuits. The “good life” entails living according to transcendent ideas about the “good.” It is the subordination of action to generalized concepts of right and value. Socrates was executed for subverting law and order in the Greek city-states. His historical significance is much broader, according to Stirner, because he also helped subvert antiquity in its entirety by promoting the infusion of the corporeal world with ideas, specters, and ghosts. Socrates contributed to the destruction of the boundaries between the material and the spiritual.

The conflict between the sensual orientation of antiquity and the spiritual orientation of modernity was also expressed in the conflicts between Judaism and Christianity. Judaism maintained the sensual notion that life is to be enjoyed, that the senses matter, and that it is appropriate for individuals to orient themselves toward the world of things. The Christians challenged Judaism by creating a faith based on a God who was also a man. The pre-Christian separation between the corporeal and spiritual world was shattered by the birth, life, and resurrection of Jesus. Ultimately, faith in the divinity of Jesus, not his corporeality, mattered to the Christians, again subordinating the material to the spiritual. A similar conflict appeared between the Romans and the Christians. The Roman philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism were both oriented toward the senses and the material world. Both defined ethics as the search for, or cultivation of, “wisdom,” knowing how to live in this life, or managing tragedy and finding value in a physical world. The Stoics and Epicureans gave preference to everything private, personal, and sensual. They directed their philosophies toward the individual’s encounter with a physical world that offered both pain and pleasure, tragedy and enjoyment. The Christians, on the other hand, elevated faith in the divine nature of Jesus as the fundamental principle of their religion, their cause, and their social movement.

The conquest of Rome by Christianity signals the first victory of modernity. But modernity took centuries to develop and refine the “dominion of the mind.” For Stirner, the most powerful expression of the Christian, modernist world is in the philosophy and science that developed in the period from after the fall of Rome to work of the Young Hegelians. In this period, the mind becomes omnipotent, thought becomes sacred, and corporeality becomes meaningless. Descartes’ dictum, *cogito ergo sum*, is perhaps the clearest, most succinct expression of the modernist *Weltgeist*: existence and

identity are reduced to thought. Modernity is the “dominion of the mind.” Modernity boasts about its historical victory over antiquity,

I have struggled until I won my ownership of the world. It has ceased to be overpowering, unapproachable, sacred, divine, for me; it is undeified, and now I treat it so entirely as I please. . . . The world has become prosaic, for the divine has vanished from it: it is my property, which I dispose of as I (namely, the mind) choose.<sup>14</sup>

What distinguishes the world of antiquity from modernity is that the former generated and made peace with the existence of spiritual beings, while the latter wrestled to understand and dominate them. The ancients created spirits, built the heavens, and established a *détente* with them. They did not storm the heavens or challenge the basic constructs inherent in religion, culture, and ideology. The ancients did not seek to eliminate the boundaries between the earth and the heavens. They interpreted their place in the cosmos as dictated by nature.

So antiquity finishes with the world of things, the order of the world, the world as a whole; but to the order of the world, or the things of this world, belong not only nature, but all relations in which man sees himself placed by nature.<sup>15</sup>

The “inheritance of antiquity” is a material or corporeal world that lies dead and despised at the feet of the moderns. It is far beneath the moderns, their thoughts, their spirits, and their heaven. The moderns console themselves with the notion that the senses are deceived by the material world, but the world cannot fool the spirit or the mind. Modernity is spiritual freedom. The spirit is unchained, it is above the bonds of nature, emancipated, supernal, and free of the physical world.

In contrast to antiquity, the prevailing ethic of the modern period is creation, innovation, and change, “to wreck all customs in order to put new and better customs in their place.” Thus, the moderns are preoccupied with “storming the heavens,” dominating nature, and overthrowing old regimes, beliefs, and norms to install new regimes, beliefs, and norms that reinforce the dominion of spirit or the mind. Hence, as antiquity dissembled and modernity emerged, the Jews overthrew the heaven and gods of the Greeks, the Christians overthrew the supreme being and heaven of the Jews, and the Protestants overthrew the supreme being and heaven of the Catholics. Enlightenment philosophy and science overthrew the supreme being and heaven of the Protestants. Each transformation sought to create a realm of freedom in spirit, thought, and mind. With the rise of Christianity, especially, the social world is infused with spirits, and life is subordinated to a spiritual cause.

Stirner alleges that each transformation in the movement from antiquity to modernity reformed and strengthened the belief system that already existed: a concept of a supreme being and a heaven that provides refuge from alienation and domination. In the modernist revolutions of religion, philosophy, and science, humans express their enmity to the supreme being and heaven of antiquity. However, they reconstruct both in the form of new spirits and new causes. Stirner prefigures his challenge to modernity by asking, when will humans at last really find themselves? When will they finally annihilate the supreme being and heaven? When will the search for the “immortality of the soul” change to the “mortality of the mind?”<sup>16</sup>

Stirner does not limit his description of the rise of modernism with comments on religion. Instead, he extends his critique into a discussion of critical philosophy, which is clearly directed at Hegel, the Young Hegelians, and, especially, Feuerbach. The philosophy of Hegel, the Young Hegelians, and Feuerbach overthrew the God and heaven of Protestantism in the effort to create a modernist “heaven on earth.” Stirner is as much of an opponent of this philosophic “realm of spirit” as those created by the ancients in their religions. Among the moderns, the supreme being and the realm of spirits and ghosts find their “right standing” in the critical or speculative philosophy of Hegel and Feuerbach. In philosophy, the “freedom of the spirit” and “immortality of the mind” exist in the realm of universal, transcendent, and absolute thoughts, concepts, and ideas, which are taken as the unassailable, objective reality. The political task of modern philosophy and science is to humanize the universal and universalize the human. It is to create, promote, and impose the transcendent and the absolute on society and individuality. Modernity brings the transcendent and absolute to earth, subordinating life to them.

Stirner concludes his discussion of the ancients and the moderns with the observation that humans will never really vanquish “shamanism” and free themselves from a world inhabited by spooks and ghosts until they reject the belief in ghosts or spirits, and the belief in “spirit” itself: the prevailing ideas embedded in culture that mediate and regulate the thoughts and behaviors of individuals. This means that it is as important to critique the abstract, transcendent concepts in critical philosophy as it is to critique the religious and cultural concepts of the ancients. Feuerbach’s modernist concept of “Man” or “Humanity” was elevated as the new supreme being destined to govern society, culture, and ideology. The function of philosophy, science, and religion in the modern world is to promote and fix eternal and absolute concepts. Thus, scientific and moral laws serve the new supreme being.

Stirner’s historical dialectic includes the notion that macrolevel social movements, causes, regimes, and ideologies challenge, attack, and super-

sede old, decaying social formations. Marx and Engels attacked Stirner for his “idealistic” analysis that ignored a materialist analysis of history based on class conflict. Stirner’s analysis of the rise of modernity includes a concept of class conflict. He understands and appreciate the role of “material” social dynamics. Stirner’s analysis is multidimensional and multi-tiered. It includes both “idealist” and “materialist” dimensions. It examines these at the macrolevels of politics and economics, a midrange level of culture and ideology, and a microlevel of cognition and interaction in everyday life. Stirner emphasizes philosophy, culture and prevailing ideas, but he recognizes that ideas have social and historical importance because they are imposed on society and individuals by causes, movements, and institutions. Ideas enter into society and history. They become a material force through the practical actions of human beings.<sup>17</sup> His analysis of the rise of modernity is focused on the process by which transcendent or generalized concepts dominate social life.

Like Hegel and Marx, Stirner presents a broad “hierarchy” of historical periods that provides some detail to his discussion of the transition from antiquity to modernity, specifically, the rise of the Christian and European nations and the dissolution of the Egyptian-African and Chinese-Asian empires.<sup>18</sup> Stirner rejects the notion that historical change, the transcendence of one regime by another, entails the realization of freedom or societal progress of any type. Modernity is not superior to antiquity and it is not a benchmark in humanity’s perfection or a presumed march to utopia. Stirner is critical of the ancients, the moderns, and the incipient postmodernist thinkers he encounters. Stirner is also suspicious of the facts taken as history, and the historical method itself. The historical method helps articulate his critique of “fixed ideas” and identifies the qualities of “ownness” and the unique ego. It is difficult to find in his discussion any assertion or implication that any one regime, race, culture, or historical period is superior or preferable to another. His discussion of the transition from antiquity to modernity lays a foundation for an understanding of the struggle of the individual against society and state in all historical periods, the central idea of dialectical egoism. *The Ego and Its Own* describes the struggle of the individual against the social order in a definite historical context: modernity. It is important to examine how Stirner characterizes the modern world, why it generates alienation, and how it is a problem for individuality and self-ownership.

## ALIENATION AND REIFICATION IN MODERNIST THOUGHT

Stirner argues in *The Ego and Its Own* that Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer articulated the most advanced and clearest statements on the cul-

tural and ideological characteristics of modernity, even though both were radical critics of Christianity and Hegelianism. Both Feuerbach and Bauer were principled philosophic rebels who sought to overthrow the domination of culture and philosophy by Christian theology. Both paid dearly for their radicalism. Bauer was incarcerated for his political activism. Neither was able to retain a teaching position because of his atheism. Both sought to undermine the alienation they believed was inherent in the Christian worldview. As far as Stirner was concerned, however, Feuerbach and Bauer were thoroughly modernist men of the “new times.” They had merely created a new form of alienation and reinforced the modernist “dominion of the mind.” The critique of modernity in *The Ego and Its Own* is a refutation of Feuerbach’s and Bauer’s view of alienation.

Stirner’s principal objection to modernity is that it subordinates life, nature, and the person to “the dominion of the mind.” To the ancients, the world was a realm of material, worldly things that were “given.” Nature and the corporeal individual were the unassailable truth, the dogma that held captive the thought and behavior of individuals. Antiquity was challenged by newer forms of thought, especially Christianity, that challenged the old forms in the guise of an incipient humanism that offered liberation and fulfillment through a synthesis of both the material and the spiritual. The Protestant Reformation was a pivotal event in the evolution of modernity because it promised a “warm-hearted” humanism, a universal love of humanity, a consciousness of individual freedom and dignity, and a “consciousness of itself and its covenant with people.” But the “warm-hearted” humanism of Protestantism negates the affection and warm heartedness for the corporeal person with “hide and hair.” It favors a “pure” theoretical love for humanity. The affection for individual persons is “treason” against the pure, theoretical love of humanity in Christianity and humanism. The “pure warm-heartedness” of Protestantism, Christianity, humanism, is warm hearted toward nobody in particular, “it is only a theoretical interest, a concern for man as man, not as a person.” The individual, the person, the physical entity, is repulsive to humanism in all forms because it is not the abstraction: humanity.<sup>19</sup>

What finally defined modernity after centuries of conflict among Christians, scientists, atheists, and humanists, is the “spirit,” the essence, the abstraction, the “ideal type.” Modernity is thus characterized by an “alienness” that counterposes the “spirit” or the realm of abstractions and essences against individuals who have a physical existence. The person is not the spirit and the spirit is not the person. Feuerbach and the humanists labored to liberate humans from the alienation of religious thought that sought the essence of humanity in the “other world.” Feuerbach believed that God is only the externalized human essence. He demanded that this externalized human essence be recognized as such and returned to “this



world." God is nothing more than "the human essence" reflected in an ideal form. The task of philosophy for the humanists is to return this self-knowledge to human beings as a collectivity, which entails a revolutionary transformation of culture and ideology. Humanism redefines "spirit" and challenges the Christian foundations of modern thought and society.

Feuerbach argues that modern thought must abandon theology and the philosophy of religion in favor of psychology and anthropology. It must recognize "anthropology as itself theology." Anthropology, the study of humanity from a collective and historical perspective, is the means to "attain a true, self-satisfying identity of the divine and human being, the identity of the human being with itself." Feuerbach says that the alternatives to his position can only be a "half measure—a thing of the imagination—a perversion, a distortion." All division of the divine and the human, or separation of the divine and the human, must be abolished in favor of the "true identity" of human being, or the unity of the human nature with itself.<sup>20</sup> In Christianity, the most advanced form of thought in the modern period, faith in the divinity of Jesus binds people to each other and is the basis of the person's relationship to the external world. Feuerbach argues that once anthropology replaces theology as the prevailing explanation of human being, the role of faith in Christianity will be replaced by "love." There is a contradiction between faith and love that must be resolved in favor of love. Whereas the Christian dictum states that "God is love," the humanist says that "love is the supreme being." Feuerbach argues that the Christians have it backwards: God is not love. Instead, love is God. For Feuerbach, "God," or the subject in the Christian dictum, is "the darkness in which faith shrouds itself; the predicate is the light which first illuminates the intrinsically dark subject."<sup>21</sup> The method of critical or speculative philosophy is merely to invert the subject and the predicate.

If faith is the subject and love is the predicate,

Love does not alone fill my soul: I leave a place open for my uncharitableness by thinking of God as a subject in distinction from the predicate. It is therefore inevitable that at one moment I lose the thought of love, at another the thought of God.<sup>22</sup>

The problem with Christian love, for Feuerbach, is that it is a "particular, limited love" that does not abolish the distinction between "Christianity and heathenism." Its "particularity is in contradiction with the nature of love, an abnormal, loveless love." Christian love is love mediated by God, the external supernatural being, and the social institutions erected to implement his word on earth. True love, however, needs no special title or authority, and it needs no external mediation. It is the "universal law of intelligence and Nature; it is nothing else than the realization of the unity of the species through the medium of moral sentiment." The type of love

envisioned in Feuerbach's humanism is presumably superior to faith because it is founded on the "unity of the species, the unity of intelligence on the nature of mankind."<sup>23</sup> Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians believed that the nature of God and faith is "nothing else than the nature of man placed out of man, conceived as external to man." Truth and human liberation are nothing else than the "reduction of the extra-human, supernatural, and antirational nature of God to the natural, immanent, inborn nature of man."<sup>24</sup> Feuerbach's humanism is an atheism that seeks (a) the abolition of God as a metaphysical or suprahuman entity, and (b) its replacement, or reconstruction, with the idea that humanity is God, the absolute, the supreme being. The supreme being is "humanity" expressed and interpreted in an ideal, essential, or spiritual form.

The Young Hegelians believed that Feuerbach made a significant theoretical advance over Hegelian thought and laid the philosophic groundwork for a revolutionary transformation of Europe that would eliminate alienation in culture, economics, and politics. Stirner dissented from the prevailing view of Feuerbach. Feuerbach does not discard religion. Instead, he clutches, in despair, at the "total substance of Christianity," dragging it out of heaven to make humanity appear as God. Feuerbach still yearns for the "other world" of religion. Unlike Christianity, he wants to bring it to earth. Stirner issues a challenge to the humanists by saying that it does not matter whether the ideal form of humanity is viewed externally as God or viewed internally as the "essence of man." The person is neither God nor "man." The person is neither some sort of supreme outward essence nor a supreme inward essence. The person cannot be reduced to an essence or to a species. Feuerbach has really created a false dichotomy because Christians tend to think of the supreme being in both kinds of "otherworldliness, the inward and outward." The "Spirit of God" also "dwells within us," according to the Christians. Like the "Spirit of God," the essence of humanity, "dwells in heaven and dwells in us; we poor things are just its 'dwelling,' and force it to move to us bag and baggage, then we, its earthly apartments, will be badly overcrowded."<sup>25</sup>

What difference does it really make if Feuerbach humanizes the divine and mystifies the human by recreating the supreme being as an essence or spirit that dwells on earth? Human beings are just its "dwelling." From the standpoint of the individual, the essence, ideal, or spirit is not the person. It is different, something alien. While Feuerbach and the humanists intended to overthrow the domination of thought by theology, they succeeded only in creating a new theology and a new form of alienation.

By bringing the spirit down to earth, Feuerbach and the humanists managed to "spiritualize" the whole world, to make the physical and social worlds an "enigmatical ghost," to make the world "uncanny" and haunted by spooks. With Christianity, the "word became flesh." With Feuerbach's

humanism, the world became spiritualized, uncanny, enchanted, haunted by essences and spirits. As humanity becomes spiritualized, it also becomes sacred. The sacred is always alien, uncanny, strange, and unfamiliar. The essence of "Man" or humanity "reaches beyond every individual." It is not his or her essence. It is a general, universal, and higher essence. For the atheists and the humanists, humanity, the "highest essence," is sacred. Those who revere it become saints and whatever they do becomes saintly. Human action, in contradiction to Feuerbach's intent, once again becomes mediated by an external, spiritual being: humanity or the "essence of Man." Love, which is the most sacred, saintly activity for the humanists when it is universal, becomes the new faith. Human thought and behavior are once again alienated and subordinated to an external, spiritual entity.

Stirner argues that modernist philosophy and science are the search for essences and foundations. The basic methodology of humanism is to search for the essence by first separating and degrading the "misapprehended appearance" to a "bare semblance," "a deception," "empty appearance," or "deceitful appearance." The concern of philosophy and science is not with the world of appearance but with the realm of essences. Some of the essences derived from appearances are thought to be good. For Feuerbach, the essence of human feeling is "love" and the essence of human thought is "truth." Other essences are labeled "bad." Regardless, the search for essences and the discarding of phenomenal appearance is the methodology of humanism or modern thought. The one-sided search for essences subverts the realm of everyday life in which persons have a "this worldly," material reality and interact with each other as physical beings. In everyday life, individuals are not essences to each other. But, in modernist systems of knowledge, they have a "higher essence" hidden within. Stirner argues that for the humanists, this "higher essence," the truth of humanity, calls forth a mutual reverence if it is recognized as such. If the "higher essence" is not recognized, the mutual reverence is not forthcoming. Individuals appear as merely "perishable bodies" to each other. When the "higher essence" is mutually recognized, persons do not actually recognize, respect, or revere each other, but only the "higher essence" that is hidden within them.

In humanism, "Humanity" or "Man" is the truth within persons. Their physical existence is a mere "mortal veil" that covers the truth and must be exposed as mere "deceitful semblance." For Feuerbach, "Man" was a universal, a general truth, not a particular individual. For Marx, "class" was the universal, general truth. For race theorists and multiculturalists, "race" and "ethnicity" are universal, general truths. For sexists and feminists, "gender" is a universal, general truth. The individual in humanist thought is a mere vessel that carries the universal in a physical, particular form. The person, in his or her particularity, does not matter to humanism

or modern thought. The individual, the particular, is subordinate to the essence. The thoughts and feelings that individuals have for themselves and each other—if they cherish self and other, find nourishment in self and other, satisfy the needs of self and other—is mere egoism, particularity. It is a selfish refusal to honor the hallowed specters or ghosts derived by modern philosophy and science. Stirner concludes that the humanist methodology that knows, acknowledges, and respects essences alone is nothing more than religion. It is an inverted perspective that sees truth only in the realm of essences, spooks, and ghosts.

The alienated world of humanist modernity is not only haunted, it has the attributes of a “corporeal ghost.” As Stirner says, “Indeed, it ‘walks,’ it is uncanny through and through, it is the wandering seeming-body of a spirit, it is a spook.” Humanity, the “higher essence, the spirit, that walks in everything, is at the same time bound to nothing, and only ‘appears’ in it. Ghosts in every corner!”<sup>26</sup>

A ghostly world surrounds you everywhere; you are always having apparitions or visions. Everything that appears to you is only the phantasm of an indwelling spirit, is a ghostly “apparition”; the world is to you only a “world of appearances,” behind which the spirit walks. You “see spirits.”<sup>27</sup>

Stirner called the essences fetishized by Feuerbach and the left Hegelians “fixed ideas.” Fixed ideas subordinate humans to their power and control. Feuerbach and the left Hegelians sought to overturn the alienated world of Christianity by inverting the subject and predicate, by making the human the subject and the divine the predicate, but they succeeded only in creating a new form of alienation in which the human essence is taken to be the new absolute idea or the new supreme being. “Man” or humanity is the fixed idea that becomes the standard of all truth and value. It is an alien concept that reduces persons to appearances and semblances. Stirner says that the fixed idea is “an idea that has subjected the man to itself.” It “fixes” reality as a realm which elevates essences, specters, and ghosts to the subject or absolute idea, and reduces persons to the predicate. Feuerbach’s modernism demands that the supremacy and corporeality of the human essence be taken on faith. Stirner argues that fixed ideas are not only in the philosophic pronouncements of the modernists, they also appear in the churches, newspapers, parliaments, and everyday discourse.

Fixed ideas are analogous to delusions. They achieve a “firm footing” because they are supported with social and political power. Fixed ideas become sacred and attract the fanatical devotion among the humanists, no less than the Christians and other religious movements. “Moral faith is as fanatical as religious faith.”<sup>28</sup> Stirner says that the humanists, although they have thrown off Christianity, still retain the “dogma of faith” because of their belief in morality and moral commandments. Morality is the new,

eternal, absolute, unassailable body of ideas that structures human thought and behavior, generally backed by the power of the state to ensure compliance. Individuals are expected and coerced to submit to the external, objective, sacred, and reified requirements for human thought and behavior. In the place of free inquiry and critical, independent thought, the humanists substitute new dogmas and reduce thought to fixed ideas. They intend for the mind to “shed the snake-skin of religion.” Modernist humanism reconstructs the mind as a machine that eschews free thought in favor of sacred concepts and fixed ideas. Modernity reconstructs determinacy and eschews indeterminacy and creativity.

In advanced modernity, the humanists no longer say “God is love.” Instead, they say “love is divine.” Love for the essence of “Man,” which is operationalized in everyday life, is the basis for transforming social relations and recreating a post-Christian social order. The emphasis on morality transforms, but also recreates the rationale for obedience to authority. In antiquity and the earlier periods of modernity, submission to authority was largely based on a sacred duty to obey the almighty, supernatural deity. In the latter periods of modernity, when science and rationalism began to challenge Christian hegemony, “morality” became the standard of truth and value in social relations. In the post-Christian era, individuals are expected to subordinate their judgment and behavior to morality, ethics, or “the good.” Morality or “civic virtue” is the “fundamental pillar of social life and the state,” or the dominion of reason and natural law. The differentiation of the “moral” from the “immoral” became the primary arbiter of thought and behavior. “Morality” is the most important fixed idea in modernity because it identifies and disciplines selfish, rebellious, and sacrilegious thoughts and behaviors. Moral commandments proffered by elites in the state, the media, the schools, and the churches achieve the status of fixed ideas through their enforcement by law and uncritical acceptance by individuals.

The generalized, universal, abstract love promoted by humanists is actually the new piety. Fanatical loyalty to humanist spooks replaces fanatical loyalty to the spooks of religion. Abstract love is the legitimation for submission to the state and culture of modernity. Far from abolishing the uncritical acceptance of authority and domination, humanism recreates new forms of authority and domination with a kinder, gentler rhetorical flourish. Love is operationalized in everyday life as morality, and morality is the piety of humanism. Just as morality becomes the new piety, “natural law” provides the content of morality and becomes the new divine law. The core concepts of humanism that regulate behaviors among persons, “natural law,” “natural understanding,” “natural right,” and “natural justice,” are cloaked in the rhetoric of science, rationalism, and secularism. They are nevertheless equivalent to their religious or divine

counterparts since they are thought to be a priori, universal, eternal, and absolute; that is, they are simply “built into” the landscape of life awaiting discovery by philosophy, law, and science. The laws of nature, reason, and justice are beyond challenge by ordinary individuals. They purport to be universal and they depend on elites or technical specialists for their revelation, interpretation, and application to individual behavior and social life. The defining characteristic of natural law, reason, and justice is that they are prescriptions for thought and behavior that are inherent in the nature of things. The laws of nature, reason, and justice are given, not constructed. They are known only through the appropriate methodology that is available to a select few.

Self-renunciation is one of the most important implications of the humanism of “modern times.” It is a critical feature of Stirner’s theory of reification: the reduction of thought to a mechanism.<sup>29</sup> Reification is based on the existence of fixed ideas and decisions by individuals to recognize them and submit their own consciousness and will to them. Reification is partially a social phenomenon in that social institutions identify and elevate ideas as necessary determinants of the thoughts and behaviors of individuals. But reification is also an outcome of the choices of individuals if they submit to societal demands that they serve causes or ideals that are more important than their feelings, thoughts or desires. It is a renunciation of self, or a renunciation of the person’s ability to participate in the organization of his or her life. Subsequent to the person’s decision to submit to a fixed idea, the person renounces ownership of the goals, values, and aspirations that structure his or her behavior; they cease to be the property of the person. The person claims, perhaps in bad faith, that they no longer belong to him or her. Self-renunciation is an alienation or estrangement of thought and value in which persons view their goals and behavior, as well as those of other persons, from a “foreign” or external standpoint that surveys and despises the “impure” motives and actions of human beings. Anticipating somewhat Ayn Rand’s notion of altruism, Stirner equates self-renunciation with “unselfishness,” or he identifies self-renunciation as one dimension of unselfishness or altruism.<sup>30</sup> Stirner argues that unselfishness occurs when the person “disposes” of thoughts and values as his or her own property, and treats them as fixed ideas, which acquire a “stubbornness” and become the master of the person. Self-renunciation, unselfishness, is the process of dissolving the self as a competent, autonomous entity capable of making decisions, acting on them, and accepting responsibility for their consequences.

Self-renunciation also has an external, societal component that inhibits the development of competent, autonomous selves. Stirner notes that there is a difference between those feelings and thoughts that are “one’s own” or “aroused in me,” and those that are “imparted,” “imposed,” and

“dictated” to the person. The latter are feelings and thoughts that are propounded by social institutions in the interest of ensuring submission to authority and maintaining social order. Stirner uses the examples of education, religion, politics, and culture to develop the point that social institutions, at a minimum, encourage or promote self-renunciation in the interest of the “external standpoint” of the collectivity and religious and political authorities.

Who is there that has never, more or less consciously, noticed that our whole education is calculated to produce feelings in us, instead of leaving their production to ourselves however they may turn out? If we hear the name of God, we are to feel veneration; if we hear that of the prince’s majesty, it is to be received with reverence, deference, submission; if we hear that of morality, we are to think that we hear something inviolable.<sup>31</sup>

Self-renunciation is fostered by social institutions. It entails an inverted relationship between the individual and the object of thought and behavior. The object becomes the subject. The person becomes the predicate. In the socialization process, the person loses the ability to create or to participate in the creation of knowledge. The person is relegated to the role of “learning,” or fixated on an inert external object. The person is reduced to passively observing, knowing, or fathoming the object, instead of dissolving, using, or consuming the object as an active subject. What is “imparted” is objective, external, and alien, it is not “our own.” It becomes sacred and is “hard work” to resist or to “lay aside.”

The process of socialization, or any interaction between the person and the social institution, is also a process of potential resistance and control. Self-renunciation is the victory of the social institution; it is the outcome of the conflict between the person and the institution over the nature of reality and knowledge. Stuffed with the “lofty thoughts,” “eternal principles,” and “inspiring maxims” of the imparted feelings promoted by social institutions, the person matures, accepts defeat, renounces self. In Stirner’s dialectical egoism, the specific content of reification may vary by society and historical period, but it always entails alien, fixed ideas and the renunciation of the ability of individuals to create mind, self, and society. In the advanced stages of modernity, reification has a humanist content and rhetoric that emerged from the major tensions and conflicts in modernism, particularly in the struggle of philosophy and science against religion.

## THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF MODERNIST THOUGHT

Philosophy and science triumph in modernity as the only valid forms of consciousness and discourse. They defeat religion as a social institution,

but they retain elements of it in the form of spirit or essence. They do not overcome reification, but recreate it in a new form. Subsequent to philosophy's ascent to the apex of the modernist hierarchy of thoughts, spirits, and essences, "philosophy cannot achieve anything higher, for its essence is the omnipotence of mind, the almightiness of mind."<sup>32</sup> Science, however, eventually supersedes philosophy in establishing its form of consciousness as absolute. Thanks primarily to the work of Descartes, science becomes the most modern form of thought. It began with absolute doubt, crushed consciousness to mere atoms, and rejected everything that mind and thought cannot legitimate as valid.<sup>33</sup> The nature of human existence was itself reduced to thought. For Descartes, persons are not their bodies or flesh and bone, they are mind and only mind. The meaning of *cogito ergo sum* is that only mind lives, its life is the true life. The work of Hegel only reinforces Descartes and the worldview of modernity on this point. Hegel tells us in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that only the actual is rational and the rational is actual. Thus, reason, mind, and spirit is infused into everything real. Everything—nature, society, and individuality—becomes reason, mind, and spirit, even the worst thoughts and behaviors of individuals. Only the thought lives, everything else is dead. Nothing lives and nothing is real except the ghost, the essence, the thought. In Hegel's thought, reason is victorious and all must serve it.<sup>34</sup>

While science and philosophy defeated the consciousness and organizational facets of religion, neither can legitimately claim that they promote freedom, since they have only subordinated persons to the power of objectivity, the power of objective facts that are actual and rational. The most oppressive of these is reverence for culture, the actual and rational rules governing interpersonal interaction. The fear of transgression against morality is the primary form of social control, the basic weapon of humanism's struggle against egoism, individuality, and particularity. All wisdom of the moderns is in the science of mind, spirit, essence, or "Man," the God of humanism and modernity. In modernity, "Man" is the most oppressive spook, the primary enemy of individuality and particularity.

The supremacy of "Man" or humanity in modernity was the outcome of a conflict between religion, particularly Christianity, and philosophy and science. The hegemony of humanity is not without challenge, but it has been secured by the ideologies and activism of philosophers, scientists, public intellectuals, and by institutionalized forms of political and economic power. In Stirner's view, the supremacy of humanity is maintained by a social system that includes a structure of political and economic power, a cultural reinforcement of the concepts and principles of humanism, and an ethical system that guides and enforces appropriate thought and behavior at the level of individuals. Stirner identifies the social system of the most advanced period of modernity as "liberalism"



and argues that it experienced three incarnations roughly from the time of the rise of the bourgeoisie, or the bourgeois victories in the American and French Revolutions, to the period that saw the publication of the works of Feuerbach and the young Hegelians. Stirner argues that Feuerbach and his colleagues among "The Free" made no break with modernity. "The Free" did not transcend modernity; they are merely the "most modern" of philosophers.

"Liberalism," for Stirner, is the most advanced expression of modernist thought. It is the political, economic, and cultural expression of modernity, captured in revolutionary democratic politics, classical economics, and humanist thought. It evolved out of the interests of science and philosophy to defeat the vestiges of antiquity, ensuring that the Cartesian and Hegelian notions of mind and spirit are infused throughout politics, culture, and society. Liberalism is a philosophy and social movement that ensures that people are primarily governed by morality, conscience, and the dominion of mind, not merely through physical coercion. Stirner argues that liberalism's primary political and ideological function is to discredit and obliterate the remaining elements of religion, and to ensure that the "sacred" is a quality of the human. The agenda of liberalism includes the following principles:

1. The human must replace the divine;
2. The natural must replace the sacred;
3. The political must replace the ecclesiastical;
4. The scientific must replace the doctrinal;
5. Measureable, a posteriori concepts must replace a priori concepts; and
6. Eternal, natural laws must replace "crude dogmas."

The initial agenda of liberalism was pursued through political movements and changes, particularly the American and French Revolutions and reforms in Europe that created constitutional government and democratic participation. Liberalism, the philosophic form of advanced modernity, underwent several transformations. The endgame of the transformations of modernist thought is a progression (a) from *political liberalism*, the theories and movements that seek "masterlessness," in which persons are freed from servitude to other persons, but in which the master arises again as the absolute state; (b) to *social liberalism*, the theories and movements that seek "possessionlessness," in which persons are freed from care, want, and responsibility, and in which all possessions potentially become the property of society and the state; and (c) to *humane liberalism*, the theories and movements that seek "godlessness," in which persons are freed from prejudice, judgment, and submission to the metaphysical, and in which faith is recreated as faith in humanity. Through these trans-

formations, humanity is finally exalted, separated from people and lifted above them.

### **Political Liberalism**

The goal of political liberalism, the first incarnation of liberalism, as an ideology and movement was to elevate, protect, and enforce the notions that there is (a) nothing sacred in nature and (b) nothing else in society other than “human being” or “Man.” The political liberals were atheists or deists who resisted all notions of the existence or participation of God in public life. Political liberalism is an ideology that seeks the elimination of servitude to religious or human masters. People are only expected to obey the law, which is rooted in natural rights and the sovereignty of the people.

Political liberalism is a philosophy of “commonalty” that seeks to destroy individuality, particularity, and egoism in the political life of human beings by ensuring that public life is purely human. The state or public life is differentiated in liberal thought from civil society where purely particular, individual, or egoistic interests are pursued. The individual in liberal political theory is always an egoist. The collective, the public, the nation, the state is the true being that requires persons to shed or discard their individuality and inequality and consecrate themselves to the higher presupposition, the “commonalty.” Political liberalism struggled to secure the freedom of persons from the dominion of a personal master and the freedom of each individual person from other persons. Political liberalism was the enemy of monarchy and aristocracy. Its historical agent, the bourgeoisie, destroyed monarchy and aristocracy in revolutions in America and France and the constitutional reforms in Britain and Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Political liberalism rejects the notion that power and authority can be legitimately vested in particular individuals through birthright, charisma, or religious blessing. Political legitimacy is derived through legal entitlement, a constitution or charter which confers sovereignty on the “commonalty.”

In Stirner’s parlance, “commonalty” refers to the body politic, the entirety of the population in a nation-state. It carries two other meanings as well. First, it entails shared cultural beliefs that emphasize a compliant, productive morality, and the notion that the state is the dominant social institution, excluding no one and guaranteeing rights for all. The corollary is that the person’s value consists in being a citizen or a subject of the state. The commonalty emerged as the revolutionary and reformist movements in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century struggled to defeat monarchism and the privileges of the aristocracy. The basic principles of political liberalism, which elevate the interests of the commonalty, include:

1. The state must not be structured on the basis of social classes, individuals should be represented.
2. The state is the absolute arbiter of rights and, thus, should be a commonality of free and equal citizens, all enjoying the same rights.
3. Sovereignty is based on majority rule, which is operationalized through the mastery of the majority of representatives, and the concomitant powerlessness of constituents.
4. While boundaries remain between the state and civil society, within the state there are no separate, particular interests, only the general interest.
5. Each citizen devotes self to the welfare of the whole, or the state, and thus, each person dissolves into the state making the state's welfare his goal and ideal.

Political liberalism intended to make the commonality the heir to the privileged aristocracy within the state and achieves this goal by asserting dominance over all other social institutions, including religion, and over civil society and individuals. In political liberalism, personal freedom means "freedom from persons" or the securing of each individual from other persons. In theory, the law alone commands. While "individual liberty" was the professed goal of the liberal state, the evolution of political liberalism ensured only the subordination of the person to the state, a consequence of the Thermidorian Reaction that succeeds every revolution and every reformation. Stirner says that the reaction only proves what revolution and reformation really are, vehicles to extend and strengthen the power of the state. The epoch of statism, the absolute domination of society and individuality by the state, dawns with political liberalism. It is the first robbery of modernity. The state appropriates the right and power of persons to make decisions about their own lives autonomously from the state and commonality. No one has the right to command, even to command their own behavior. Only the state can command.

Second, while the state is no longer structured on the basis of social classes or estates, class inequalities do not disappear. Instead, sharp differences between the bourgeoisie, or the class of property, and the proletariat, the class of labor, emerge as important social dynamics that the state must control. Anticipating Marx, and echoing the class analysis of the socialist movements of his day, Stirner observes that the rise of the bourgeoisie is coterminous with the rise of political liberalism. Political liberalism is the theory that justifies and promotes the ascendance of the bourgeoisie, as well as the dispossession of the proletariat. Stirner observes that the cultural and political systems work against the laborers. In the realm of culture, Stirner argues that class inequality is legitimated in a society that believes that possession reflects moral superiority, or the idea that those

who own property and wealth do so because they lead settled, secure, stable family lives and pursue honorable trades and businesses. In the realm of politics, rights and other desiderata are distributed according to the “consideration” bought by the class that has money. In the early stages of bourgeois domination, the state is able to control the societal rifts prompted by class inequality because both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat believe in the “truth of money and property.” However, labor begins to recognize that it is not rewarded according to its value; it is “exploited.” It is the enemy of the bourgeoisie and will rise against it and political liberalism. Three years before Marx and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* and seventeen years before Marx published the first volume of *Capital*, Stirner writes, “the laborers have the most enormous power in their hands, and, if they once become thoroughly conscious of it, nothing could withstand them.”<sup>35</sup> Stirner suggests that the laborers have to regard the product of labor as theirs, stop the system that devalues them, and enjoy the product of labor as theirs. Stirner concludes that the state of political liberalism rests on “the slavery of labor.” If labor resists the liberal state and becomes free, the state is lost.

### **Social Liberalism**

The liberal state is inherently unstable because of the contradiction between its professed values of equality, freedom, and universal welfare against the harsh reality of class inequality. The instability caused by class inequality provides a foundation for supplanting political liberalism with social liberalism, or the replacement of classical liberalism with socialism and communism. Under political liberalism, persons are theoretically equal under the law, but their possessions are not. The inequality of possessions threatens social stability and the fulfillment of the humanist agenda since the proletariat may decide to resist the class structure of political liberalism. Social liberalism is the term Stirner gives to the socialist, communist, and collectivist anarchist theories and movements that attempt to organize the working class and overthrow the regime of political liberalism. The writings and advocacy of pre-Marxian collectivists such as Moses Hess, William Weitling, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon were particularly important statements of social liberalism at the time Stirner prepared *The Ego and Its Own*. In Stirner’s dialectical egoist critique, political liberalism responds to the decay of monarchy and the aristocracy by arguing that no one must give orders, no one must command except a government which derives its legitimacy from popular sovereignty. Social liberalism responds to the inequality of classes by arguing that no one must own anything. Under the regime of social liberalism, not only does the state obtain a monopoly in the legitimate use of force, society alone obtains the right to possess property.

Social liberalism abhors the use of state power to protect a person's property since property enforces social boundaries on the possession and use of material objects. Political liberalism supports the right to own property and enforces this right through the use or the threat of the use of force. The person who wants "more things" and discovers that others have "more things," also finds that access to "more things" is under the control of other people. The contradiction of political liberalism is that no one is supposed to be inferior. No one is supposed to be able to command others. The lordship-bondage relationship should have been destroyed. But some people have what other people would like to have. A "circuitously restored inequality" appeared under the regime of political liberalism. The freedom of individuals from the domination by others falls short under political liberalism because private property means that some persons have the right to command and control the lives of others. Social liberalism intends to build on the accomplishments of the democratic revolutions by extending the principles of democracy and equality into the economy and the social class system. The solution of the social liberals is to discredit justifications for private property and to have the democratic state assert ownership of property through coercion. The solution of the social liberals, Stirner taunts, is forbid anyone from having anything any longer. Reduce everyone to the status of a pauper. Dispossess everyone of everything. Only the state, acting on behalf of society, can legitimately own property. The solution propounded by the social liberals is to eliminate all legitimate boundaries between "mine" and "thine." All property is to be impersonal. No individual can legitimately assert or claim ownership over anything.

The state of social liberalism is tasked with creating "ragamuffins" and "nullities." Persons are to become "ragamuffins together." Society is to become a "ragamuffin crew." The purpose of the political class is to enforce "ragamuffinism" throughout the nation.<sup>36</sup> For Stirner, this was the second great robbery of the personal in the interest of humanity. The second robbery is the appropriation of the possessions of individuals by the state on behalf of society. In the theory and practice of social liberalism, the liberal democratic state is obliged to appropriate possessions to ensure that people are not unequal in their possessions. Social liberalism intends to abolish class inequality, the inequality of possessions, the distinction between rich and poor, bourgeois and proletarian. Stirner says that this is achieved through the impoverishment or pauperization of all. Property is taken from individuals and surrendered to the ghostly society.

### **Humane Liberalism**

Humane liberalism is the label Stirner gives to the humanism or "critical philosophy" of thinkers like Feuerbach and Bruno and Edgar Bauer. In

the progression of modernist or liberal thought, Stirner identifies humane liberalism or “criticism” as the “highest presupposition,” or the apex and most advanced, predictable outcome of modernism. Humane liberalism is the target of all of the criticisms Stirner leveled against humanism, Feuerbach, and the young Hegelians in earlier sections of *The Ego and Its Own*, including the forms of alienation and reification that appear inherent in humanism. In Stirner’s view, humane liberalism is the “truth” of modernity, and it is the third and most significant robbery of the person on behalf of “humanity.” Political liberalism deprived persons of the ability to make decisions about their own lives. Social liberalism deprived them of their possessions and ownership of the products of their own labor. Humane liberalism deprived them of independent thought and personal standards of truth and value. Knowledge of “the true” and “the good” are universalized through the objectivism promoted and enforced through the atheism and humanism of critical philosophy and science. Individuality, subjectivity, and particularity in knowledge and consciousness are finally eliminated in favor of “Man” or humanity as the standard of “the true” and “the good.”

Man is the liberal’s supreme being, man the *judge* of his life, humanity his *directions*, or catechism. God is spirit, but man is the “most perfect spirit,” the final result of the long chase after the spirit or of the “searching in the depths of the Godhead,” that is, in the depths of the spirit.<sup>37</sup>

Stirner says that “state and society do not suffice for humane liberalism, it negates both, and at the same time retains them.” The political liberals sought to abolish personal will or self-will, but failed to recognize that “self-will gained a place of refuge” in private property and the market economy. Building on the “accomplishments” of the political liberals, the social liberals took away property and free trade, as well as autonomy. But the social liberals, the socialists, and the communists failed to recognize that their focus on money and goods permitted the continued existence of self-ownership because it left untouched the person’s thoughts, opinions, and sense of self. Stirner asks, “Is it only money and goods, then, that are a property, or is every opinion something of mine, something of my own?” For the humane liberals, thoughts, values, and opinions must be appropriated from the person and become common and general thoughts, values, and opinions. Self-will and property were appropriated from the person and transferred to the state and society in order to repress the “egoism” of autonomy and self-interest. The subordination of individual thought to the collective is necessary to the humane liberals to annihilate self-ownership, subjectivity, and particularity. The persistence of egoism, subjectivity, and particularity means that individuals could choose to worship some other god than “Man” or humanity. Egoism, subjectivity,

and particularity undermine “reason” and must vanish before the lofty “idea of humanity.”

Humane liberalism is therefore an advancement or an improvement upon political liberalism and social liberalism, at least in the minds of the modernists. Humanism, however, retains both the power of the state and the social appropriation of property in order to ensure that economic and social interaction become “purely human activity” through the coercive power of social institutions. Humanism, “issuing the summons to man to be ‘human,’ enunciates the necessary condition of sociability: for only as a man among men is one companionable. With this it makes known its social object, the establishment of ‘human society.’”<sup>38</sup>

Humane liberalism offers the complete, total victory of modernity because it discredits and removes from politics, culture, and daily life everything that separates or differentiates persons. It eliminates all individual prerogatives and justifications for distance from others or “humanity.” If the individual seeks to retain even one right or prerogative that is not a general right or prerogative, she or he is castigated as an “egoist.” With humane liberalism pauperization or ragamuffinism is thorough and complete. The person is thoroughly dispossessed by modernity, subordinate to its political and economic systems, as well as its culture because all private enclaves have been eliminated. Humanity becomes the supreme being as far as the everyday experiences of individuals is concerned. Political power, economic activity, and cultural reproduction occur in its name. With the triumph of humane liberalism over political and social liberalism, modernity has run its course, because there is little else it can appropriate from individuals. It occupies all social space and progressively and inexorably annihilates the vestiges of the ego, the self, and the subjective.<sup>39</sup>

However, modernity, humanism, and liberalism are not without opposition and discord. In fact, they have a deadly enemy, an invincible opposite. Society, the state, and humanity cannot master this devil: the un-man, the individual, the egoist. What is this egoist, this un-man, the devil that resists society, the state, and humanity? And what are the characteristics of the egoist who resists all of the presuppositions that modernity attempts to impose? Chapter 3 examines the second part of *The Ego and Its Own*, focusing on Stirner’s notions of “ownness,” “the owner,” and “the unique one” as the conceptual bases for the egoist opposition to modernity.

## NOTES

1. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (1844; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5–7.

2. Translation of Goethe's poem "Vanitas! Vanitatum Vanitas!" by William Flygare, appears in *Nonserviam* 19, no. 20 (2000): 20.

3. See Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 355–59 and R. W. K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist Max Stirner* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 226–51.

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1977); *The Science of Logic* (1812; repr., New York: Routledge, 2004); and *The Philosophy of History* (1837; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1956).

5. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004), 189–279; Bauer's position is summarized in Douglas Moddach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59–79; and Moses Hess, *The Holy History of Mankind* (1837; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Interesting discussions of this period in German philosophy appear in many of the studies of the young Marx, including Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), which devotes separate chapters to Marx's relationship with Bauer, Ruge, Stirner, Hess, and Feuerbach, and Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (1948; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), which devotes four chapters to this period in Marx's life and his nascent articulation of historical materialism out of the disagreements with the young Hegelians.

6. The "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" reduction of the dialectic is a product of Fichte, not Hegel nor Marx. In Hegel, Stirner, and Marx, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find any simplistic formula that succinctly expresses the logic of the dialectic. See my discussion of immanent and transcendental critique in John F. Welsh, *After Multiculturalism: The Politics of Race and the Dialectics of Liberty* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 56–57, 141–42, 195–96.

7. Stirner lambastes Feuerbach and Bauer for generalizing the notion of "spirit" to all levels of reality and seeing "essences" in all things. When Stirner uses the term "spirit" in a clearly nonreligious context, he is responding to Feuerbach and Bauer's proclivity to extend the religious consciousness to realms of existence where it is inappropriate. Far from abolishing God and religion, in Stirner's view, the atheists merely recast them in new form.

8. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 5–7.

9. It is clear that Stirner makes references to himself in the use of "I" and insists on the uniqueness, not the generality, of individual experience. However, he also frequently uses "I" as a reference to a person's or a subject's experiences in the world. Evidence in support of this point is found in many places in *The Ego and Its Own*, particularly where he speaks in conditional or contingent terms about experiences, or where he follows the consequences of ideas to a particular conclusion, or where he references individual experience in cultural and historical circumstances that the clearly does not share. In some places, he uses the "I" to refer to how other philosophers viewed social phenomena in historical perspective.

10. For example, Stirner assails as a triviality the notion that a slave can be inwardly free while externally enslaved. Stirner's frequent opposition of the internal and external, the in-itself and the for-itself, and the objective and subjective, exemplanly his roots in Hegelianism. See *The Ego and Its Own*, 144.



11. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (1837; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1956). Hegel probably did not mean that historical development stops with the Christian-Germanic period. In the preface to *Philosophy of Right* (1821; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952) and in the concluding chapter of *Science of Logic* (1812; repr., New York: Routledge, 2004). Hegel's political dialectic suggests that the hegemony of the Christian-Germanic period, and its absolutist Prussian state, like all social formations, will end and be replaced by another social formation.

12. See my discussion of the role of freedom in Hegel's philosophy in "The Unchained Dialectic: Theory and Research in an Era of Educational Reform," in *Neoliberalism and Educational Reform*, ed. Wayne Ross and Rich Gibson (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007): 217–35.

13. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 24.

14. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 85.

15. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 27.

16. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 64

17. Stirner makes this point on the first page of his book and reinforces it in many places, especially in his critique of antiquity and modernity. His notion of a "cause" is that it is a vehicle by which a social movement seeks to impose an idea on society and individuals. He is profoundly concerned with the interaction between the ideal and the material, and recognizes that the content of the ideal has a dramatic impact on social relations. Marx and Engels's critique of Stirner on this point in *The German Ideology* has little or no validity, except to say that Stirner did not produce a Marxist notion of class struggle. In *The Ego and Its Own*, Stirner develops a notion of class conflict, although it is certainly not what Marx, Engels, and state socialists envision. See *The Ego and Its Own*, page 66, for his discussion of the failure of humanism to "vanquish" shamanism.

18. Stirner uses the terms "negroid" and "mongoloid" to refer to the African-Egyptian and Asian-Chinese empires. He is not referring to racial categories but to historical periods associated with the dominance of empires. His use of these terms is not to validate or reify these terms or periods in the scholarship of historical change, but to criticize them and the assumption that the Christian-Germanic culture or modern historical period are somehow superior to those of antiquity. See my discussion of Stirner's view of race and ethnicity in Welsh, *After Multiculturalism*, 153–76.

19. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 28. Feuerbach's position is summarized in *The Essence of Christianity*, 250–72. Bauer's position is summarized in Moddach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, 59–79.

20. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 235.

21. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 265.

22. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 265–66.

23. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 268.

24. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 363.

25. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 34–35.

26. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 42.

27. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 45.

28. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 45.

29. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 56–62, 68.

30. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 93–99.

31. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 61.

32. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 69.

33. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 78.

34. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 1–13.

35. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 105. Stirner's discussion of class domination legitimated by political liberalism makes it pretty clear that Marx and Engels are off the mark for criticizing Stirner as an agent of the petty bourgeoisie. Stirner expresses great sympathy for the proletariat and loathing for the bourgeoisie. Of course, his great concern is the subordination of all persons, bourgeois and proletarian alike, to the power of the state and fixed ideas, such as humanity and society.

36. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 115.

37. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 287.

38. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 120.

39. Stirner's critique of humane liberalism presents an eerie warning about the totalitarian ideologies, movements, and regimes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The ideologues and *apparatchiki* of the fascist, communist, and Islamic supremacist movements and regimes all learned that it is not enough to seize state power, private property, and subordinate markets to the demands of the "common good," as they define it. Thanks to the theoretical contributions by intellectuals such as Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukacs, totalitarians realized that they must also seize the "hearts and minds" of their subjects. Gramsci and Lukacs theorized that Marxism failed as a revolutionary ideology because it underestimates the importance of culture and consciousness in the revolutionary transformation of society and individuality. In practical terms, this means that revolutionaries must not only seize state power and confiscate private property, they must control as many forms of communication, cultural production, and symbolic interaction as possible. Those who witnessed history since the rise of the totalitarian states in the twentieth century, have seen the concrete meaning of "humane liberalism" and the consequences of the appropriation of property, particularity, and subjectivity on behalf of the state, society, and humanity. Stirner's warnings about the reduction of persons to ragamuffins or nullities anticipates the historical facts that appeared with the rise of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and continue in the totalitarian Islamic states and the consumerist welfare states. To the extent that contemporary science and philosophy function as propagandists for political, social, and humane liberalism, Stirner's exclusion from polite discourse becomes understandable.



# 3



## Ownness and Modernity: The Political Meaning of Dialectical Egoism

### THE METHOD AND CONTENT OF DIALECTICAL EGOISM

The point of departure of *The Ego and Its Own* is the dialectic Stirner formulates in his discussion of the differences between the ancients and the moderns, and the tensions within the ideology of advanced modernity. Stirner's discussion of the characteristics of modernity and the transformation of thought within it constitute an entrée to the central concept in Stirner's analysis of modernity: ownness. Stirner derives two other concepts from ownness that enable him to suggest the reconstruction of self and the self-other relationship as alternative forms of resistance to modernity: the unique one and the union of egoists.

Fixed ideas are threats to the individual's internal and external well-being regardless of whether the analysis is focused on the concepts of "gods" and "heaven" found among the ancients, or "humanity" and "society" found among the moderns. The historical transformation from antiquity to modernity entails the ascendance of the "dominion of the mind" in which the concepts and methods of philosophy, science, and humanism began to dominate politics, culture, and the everyday interaction of people. Stirner was unequivocal, but also overly optimistic in his judgment that humanism would likely be the last transformation of modernity, the last alienated philosophy: "Man is the last evil spook, the most deceptive or most intimate, the craftiest liar with honest mien, the father of lies."<sup>1</sup>

Stirner's dialectical egoist critique of antiquity and modernity provides a vantage point from which all cultures and all historical periods can be challenged. His primary interest is in developing an egoist challenge to moder-

nity founded on the concept of ownness. The chapter examines Stirner's notion of ownness and other concepts he derived to promote resistance to the politics and culture of modernity. The intent is to summarize the concepts of "ownness," "the unique one," and "the union of egoists" to complete a foundation for examining his influence upon and theoretical relationships with the writers discussed in subsequent chapters.<sup>2</sup>

Stirner's philosophy in *The Ego and Its Own* emerged as a "higher pre-supposition" from the conflict between the materialist thought of the Enlightenment thinkers and the idealism manifest in the writings of Hegel, Feuerbach, and the Young Hegelians. For Stirner, the key to individuality is the realization that interests and needs are as unique as persons. The existence and identity of persons cannot be reduced to abstractions such as humanity and society without doing significant damage to the ability of individuals to think for themselves and to act on their own behalf. Social institutions in the modern world function on the basis of reifications such as humanity and society. Thus, the state, culture, and society tend to militate against the self-enjoyment and self-fulfillment of the individual. They also elevate obedience and conformism as primary social values. The central message of *The Ego and Its Own* is that it is up to the individual to discover and to fight for what and who she or he is. There are no moral absolutes or ideological reference points outside the reality and values chosen by the individual. Stirner's concept of "ownness" or "property" is an oppositional concept that illuminates the nature of individual autonomy and encourages individuals to resist values, beliefs, and identities that the state, society, and culture attempt to impose on persons. The person or "unique one" exists in opposition to the state and society precisely because of the ability to assert ownership over who they are, what they think, and how they behave. Stirner's concept of ownership or "ownness" has a clear relationship with the notions of individual freedom and autonomy, just as it entails elements of psychological and ethical egoism. However, "ownness" cannot be reduced to any of these ideas. Certainly, Stirner's concepts of freedom, identity, and reality are founded on the notion of "ownness," which is rooted in Hegel's notion of freedom as self-conscious self-determination.<sup>3</sup>

*The Ego and Its Own* is a sharp attack on religion, political authority, and the philosophies of Stirner's contemporaries who held socialist, communist, or humanist orientations. His attack on the systematic philosophies and religions prevailing during his life entails an opposition to moral absolutes and a rejection of abstract and generalized philosophies. The human individual is the center of his analysis. In rejecting all of the fixed ideas or artificial constructions of science, philosophy, and culture, Stirner identifies the elemental self or the "unique one." He argues in *The Ego and Its Own* that we can have certain knowledge only of the unique individ-

ual. The uniqueness of the individual is the quality that each must cultivate to provide meaning for his or her life. The reality and value of all fixed ideas or generalized concepts, such as "God," "humanity," "man," "class consciousness," "social justice," and "race awareness," whether they are found in religion, philosophy, culture, or politics, must be rejected. Politically and behaviorally, this means that the individual owes nothing, not obedience, not loyalty, nor resources, to external entities or concepts, including nations, states, classes, races, or ethnic groups. All religious, scientific, and cultural constructs that seek to impose or promote a commonness or collective identity, are false, constraining, and purposeless specters that lack a meaningful referent in the material world. The challenge of the "unique one" is to resist all efforts to create and impose such specters.

As a student of Hegel, Stirner was acutely aware of both the internal and external dimensions of human existence and freedom. He clearly understood the nature and importance of what Thomas Hobbes and Isaiah Berlin called "negative freedom," a condition in which the individual is rid of external controls or where there is an absence of coercion. Berlin argues that the notion of "positive freedom," which refers to the person's access to desiderata, contributes significantly to human well-being. Stirner is much more concerned with "ownness" or the notion that the person possesses the ability to obtain those things related to a fulfilling life, especially the ability to assert ownership over thought and behavior.<sup>4</sup> Berlin's "positive freedom" is different from Stirner's concept of "ownness." "I am free of what I am rid of, owner of what I have in my power or what I control. I am at all times and under all circumstances, my own, if I know how to possess myself."<sup>5</sup> Ownness surpasses both forms of freedom. Understanding ownness requires that freedom and ownness be differentiated and placed in opposition.

Stirner believed that freedom is usually an "ideal" or a "specter" in political discourse. It is a "hollow word" especially when people do not have the "might," ability, or power to acquire what they want, to enjoy themselves, or to lead fulfilling lives. For Stirner, freedom, particularly its negative form, is usually equivalent to a "useless permission" conferred by an alien or external agent, such as the state or the collective. The modern concept of freedom is rooted in Christian ethics: humans must be "free" to choose salvation; that is, they must be free of sin. They must, therefore, be free to choose self-denial. They must be free to choose to be a servant of the righteous. Freedom is a "longing, romantic pliant, a Christian hope for un-earthliness and futurity." Following Milton's passionate defense of freedom in *Areopagitica*, freedom is the expression of the will of God, or a bargain with the Christian supreme being: freedom is granted on the condition that persons use it as directed by the powerful other. It

provides an opportunity for a test of faith and self-renunciation.<sup>6</sup> The person passes the test through obeisance and acquiescence, and, in return, receives life everlasting and emancipation from the oppression of this life. Freedom entails similar deals or implied contracts between the citizen and the state in political liberalism, the worker and society in social liberalism, and the human being and culture in humane liberalism. In each case, the person must deny or renounce self as an individual with an ego and submit to an external abstraction. The modernist concept of freedom, rooted in Christianity and political liberalism, teaches only that persons must “get rid” of themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Freedom is something that the person cannot will or create without action and conviction on his or her part. If individuals only wish and aspire for freedom, it remains an ideal or a spook. In political life, where there is action beyond aspiration, freedom always comes down to a particular freedom which includes the intent to impose a new “dominion.” For the bourgeoisie, freedom was a rhetorical tool that helped the overthrow of monarchy and aristocracy and the imposition of political liberalism, or the constitutional democratic state. For the socialists and communists, freedom meant the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the dispossession of property, and the imposition of an authoritarian, collectivist regime. For the humanists, freedom meant the destruction of religion, the deification of humanity and the elevation of speculative philosophy and science as the arbiters of truth and morality. “Freedom fighters” characteristically fight for a particular freedom and, consequently, for a new dominion, a new regime with new fixed ideas or reinterpretations of the old ones. Freedom fighters gladly take up freedom as a political rallying cry when it suits their cause, but are eager to let it go when it is inconvenient or contradicts their agenda. Freedom is ultimately conferred in a political process by the state, a political party, or a scientific doctrine. It is a condition that places the person in a state of dependence on a social organization.

Ownness is different. Ownness does not imply a lack of constraint. It is a type of action in which the person acquires and possesses ideas or objects as property. Most importantly they assert ownership over body, mind, and self.

Ownness is my whole being and existence, it is I myself. I am free of what I am rid of, owner of what I have in my power or what I control. My own I am at all times and under all circumstances, if I know how to have myself and do not throw myself away on others.<sup>8</sup>

Ownness differs from freedom in that it refers more to a relationship between the internal activity of the person and the external world. Ownness is not and cannot be reduced to a rhetorical tool or an external condition. It is an active seizure or appropriation of thoughts, values, and ob-

jects as the “property” of the individual. Stirner does not limit his concept of “property” to the narrow legal or economic meaning that it denotes today. While he offers a critique of the type of property created by the acts of the bourgeois state, he is more concerned with property as it is created by the individual in interaction with self, others, and nature. Stirner keys off of the notion of property that Hegel develops in the *Philosophy of Right*. For Hegel, property is an extension or objective manifestation of the person. In Hegel’s political theory, the defense of private property is important because it is a necessary dimension of the person as an objective being. An attack on private property is also an attack on individuality, personal identity, and the self.<sup>9</sup> Stirner develops this notion in an egoistic direction by dismissing the hegemony of the legal definition of property and redefining property as the internal and external objects appropriated by the individual as meaningful, valuable, or what they are willing to accept about themselves and the world.

It is important to emphasize that Stirner does not consider property to be only material objects such as food, clothing, and shelter, but all forms of desiderata, including values, beliefs, relationships, and a sense of self. The assertion of ownership is dependent upon the person’s “might” or willingness and ability to appropriate desiderata. He is not referring to the assertion of ownership in a narrow legal sense, or “might” in the narrow political sense of coercion. He refers to everyday, practical activities entail a variety of means, including but not limited to legal or political means. Ownness is a revelation of what a person really is. It refers to what the person really values and enjoys, and what she or he is really willing to sacrifice. It is a commitment to learn about, enjoy, and fulfill oneself. Ownness is what ultimately defines the person as a unique individual because it strips away everything that is superfluous, secondary, and tangential. Property reveals everything that is valuable and meaningful, as far as the person is concerned. Unlike freedom, ownness is a reality, not a dream, which challenges and destroys the lack of freedom by eliminating the ways in which individuals create and contribute to their own subordination.<sup>10</sup> Ownness removes the obstacles to self-enjoyment and self-fulfillment that persons blindly accept. It places them in a position to confront the obstacles imposed by others.

Stirner says that individuals secure their own “freedom with regard to the world in the degree that I make the world my own; gain it and take possession of it for myself, by whatever might, by that of persuasion, of petition, of categorical demand.” Even the means persons use to assert ownership are important because they, too, “are determined by what I am.” There is an important relationship between freedom and ownness, but ownness is more significant since it makes freedom possible and meaningful. For Stirner, “the own-man is the free-born, the man free to



begin with." The person who asserts ownership over his or her life, body, values, and identity,

recognizes nothing but himself. He does not need to free himself first because at the start he rejects everything outside himself because he prizes nothing more than himself—because he starts from himself and comes to himself.<sup>11</sup>

Ownness creates freedom. Ownness is the subject, freedom is the predicate. Ownness is the cause, freedom the effect. Ownness precedes freedom as both a value and fact. Ownness, not freedom, is the mover of human action and the creator of circumstances. Freedom is a condition created by ownness. Ownness is originality and genius. It creates new political, social, and cultural formations. Speaking of revolutionaries and rebels who fought for freedom and overthrew old forms of oppression, Stirner says "it was by this egoism, this ownness, that they got rid of the old world of gods and became free from it. Ownness created a new freedom; for ownness is the creator of everything."<sup>12</sup> It is out of egoism, ownness, or a personal sense of welfare that people get rid of old worlds and become free from them. Individuals cannot be free of external constraints unless they are owners. They must appropriate or possess themselves, their aspirations, and their values.

Freedom matters only when is it achieved through the assertion and activity of the individual. It is significant or "complete" only when it occurs through the might, choice, will, and effort of the person. Freedom to Stirner is an accomplishment, not a right. It is appropriated, not conferred. It is an outcome achieved by persons because they choose to acquire it through available means. "Emancipation" differs from "self-liberation" since the latter is actively created by the person, producing his or her own freedom. Stirner views emancipation as a limited or inauthentic form of liberation in which the person is "set free" by another agent, such as a government or political movement that "frees" slaves, workers, or citizens. As far as Stirner is concerned, emancipation is "freedom conferred." It is a false form of liberation because it is based on the ideas that self-renunciation and subordination to fixed ideas can produce liberation. Emancipation is a false form of liberation that suggests that persons can be free without having sought, chosen, willed, or struggled for freedom themselves. It suggests that freedom is merely an in-itself, external, objective condition that has no for-itself, active, subjective dimension. Emancipation is a type of freedom that is dependent upon the caprice of powerful other. Emancipation amounts to an argument that freedom is meaningful or significant without ownness.

Emancipation is opposed by self-liberation, a concept that is rooted in egoism and ownness, with the person searching what is useful to him or her as a thinking and sensual being. For Stirner, persons who are set free

politically or culturally by external actors are really unfree people cloaked in the garment of freedom. Hence, emancipated Jews are nothing different, changed, or improved in themselves. They are only "relieved" as Jews. Emancipated or not, a Jew remains a Jew. That is, they are defined by an artificial cultural category. Persons who are not self-freed are only emancipated. They experience only the negative dimensions of freedom. Similarly, the Protestant state can emancipate Catholics, but unless the individuals make themselves free, they remain simply Catholics. The democratic state can emancipate slaves, but unless slaves make themselves free, they remain only emancipated slaves. The socialist or communist state can emancipate workers, but unless they make themselves free, they remain only workers in the garment of freedom.<sup>13</sup> The task of the unique one is to create freedom by "possessing self," asserting uniqueness and independence from cultural constructs and societal constraints.

Stirner's concept of ownness cannot be reduced to negative freedom. It cannot be reduced to "selfishness," or to psychological or ethical egoism, even though he clearly believes that persons are by nature egoists. Human nature, egoism, is frequently thwarted by social, cultural, and political dynamics that promote or impose self-renunciation or self-sacrifice. Stirner's thought is a dialectical egoism, or an egoism that is continually challenged and continually emergent through the interaction and conflict among self, other, culture, and society. Certainly, Stirner's egoist or unique one looks to objects and to others to see if they are any use to him or her as a sensual being. Yet, the individual's sensuality is not the entirety of his or her "ownness." The unique one is more than a sensual being. When the individual is "given up to sensuality," she or he is not in his or her own, but is dominated by sensuality, comfort, and material objects. The individual who follows his or her own sensuality exclusively, is not self-determining. The individual is in his or her "own" only when the "master of self," or fully self-consciously self-determining. The person who owns self is not when mastered by sensuality or by anything else external to the person's self-conscious self-determination. While Stirner's concept of ownness is "selfish," it cannot be equated with the narrow form of selfishness concerned with sensuality or the mere acquisition and use of material things. The concept of ownness entails much more than sensuality or acquisition; in fact, forms of sensuality and acquisition may contradict "ownness" if the person pursues them purposelessly. The dictum that "greed is good" is clearly inconsistent with ownness in Stirner's dialectical egoism.

"Ownness" has no alien, external standard. Stirner does not view it as a fixed idea like God or humanity. Its content cannot be fixed like the Ten Commandments. It is only intended to be a description of the act of ownership by the person. In sharp contrast to Ayn Rand, Stirner's critique of modernity ridicules the notion that selfishness is a virtue since "virtue"

conjures images of external and fixed strictures on individual thought and behavior.<sup>14</sup> Modernist politics, science, and the speculative philosophy of Hegel, Feuerbach, and the Young Hegelians elevated the species above the individual forcing an antagonism between the individual and the species. In the collectivist formulations of these philosophers, the individual can only lift self above his or her individuality, and not above scripture, law, and custom, or the “positive ordinances” of the species. For Stirner, the species is nothing but an abstraction, a fixed idea to be dissolved by the owner or the egoist. Life means that individuals cannot remain what they are. They must continually strive to lift themselves above “their individuality,” or the facts of their existence at any one point in time and space. The cultural, political, and ideological strictures that elevate the species above the individual are, in fact, a form of death in that the individual’s innovation, creativity, and survival skills are subordinated to those of the species. The individual’s task is not to realize the “essence” of man, humanity, a race, or a culture, but to live as a self-conscious self-determining person, to own his or her life, mind, and self. The individual supersedes the species and, as such, is without norm, without law, and without model. All social, cultural, and political categories, including racial and cultural identities, are abstractions irreducible to the material reality of the real, living individual.

The individual thinks and acts within a context that is both external and constraining on individuals.

That such a society diminishes my liberty offends me little. Why, I have to let my liberty be limited by all sorts of powers and by everyone who is stronger; indeed, by every fellow-man; were I the autocrat, I yet should not enjoy absolute liberty. But ownness I will not have taken from me. And ownness is precisely what every society has designs on, precisely what is to secure to its power.<sup>15</sup>

He says that it is absurd to argue that there are no external forces that are more powerful than the might of the individual. What matters is the attitude and action that the person takes toward them. While religion, culture, and ideology teach and encourage individuals to reconcile and renounce themselves with the external world, Stirner declares that dialectical egoism is the enemy of every “higher power” or “supreme being.” Ownness or self-conscious self-determination requires that the individual know self as unique. Every supreme being or higher essence above the individual undermines the individual’s ownness, might, and self-determination. As long as individuals believe and act on the notion that fixed ideas and “essences” are superior, external, and unalterably constraining on them, or that their task in life is to fulfill an external ideal, they are not egoists or owners. As individuals no longer serve any ideal,

or any “higher essence” or “supreme being,” they no longer serve any other person either, but become their own. Ownness refers to a commitment and effort on the part of the individual to behave on the basis of their choices. When individuals serve themselves in their sensuality and in their thoughts, they are owners or unique egoists.

Stirner’s notion of ownness is both similar to and different from other concepts of individual freedom and self-determination in individualist, libertarian, and anarchist literature. Concepts of self-ownership are a recurrent theme in libertarian and anarchist theory especially, but none appear to approximate the form of appropriation that defines Stirner’s notion of ownness. For example, William Godwin is frequently cited as the first philosopher who deliberately articulated a systematic argument for anarchism, even though he did not call it that. Godwin based his incipient form of communist anarchism, or “political justice,” on an ethical notion of independent or private judgment, in which persons must be free to choose morally correct behaviors. Paramount among these is the notion that individuals must serve an absolute, fixed moral code. The nineteenth-century American abolitionist philosopher and activist Stephen Pearl Andrews developed a concept he called the “sovereignty of the individual,” similar to Godwin’s notion of private judgment, which decried the intrusion of the state and society into the moral and political decisions of individuals. Robert Paul Wolff published a more recent study of ethics and politics that develops an argument for anarchism based on Kant’s notion of “moral autonomy.” Godwin, Andrews, and Wolff each derived an argument for a collectivist form of anarchism that was initially grounded in an idea about the right of persons to make political and ethical decisions for themselves.<sup>16</sup>

At the more individualist end of the libertarian and anarchist spectra, political theorists such as Ayn Rand, Murray Rothbard, and Robert Nozick, despite their many differences, also developed concepts that have some limited similarities with Stirner’s notion of ownness. Rand’s rational egoism was based on an ethical theory that defines selfishness as a virtue because it directly reinforces the efforts of human beings to use their minds to ensure their survival. Her egoist thought includes both a requirement that individuals have a right and an ethical obligation to make their own decisions and to live their own lives with minimal interference by the state. Rothbard, a vehement opponent of Berlin’s notion of positive freedom, believed in both the negative concept of freedom and the idea that self-ownership was an absolute. Rothbard feared that any concession to the concept of positive freedom inevitably results in a role for the state to create the conditions necessary for the presumably loftier aspects of freedom Berlin discusses. But, Rothbard also believed that self-ownership was important, if not absolutely necessary to the form of market anar-

chism he espoused. In *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Robert Nozick also made the case for self-ownership as an ethical necessity and a precondition for the minimalist state he envisioned as a libertarian alternative to both anarchism and statism.<sup>17</sup>

The collectivist and individualist interpretations of both anarchism and libertarianism that include concepts like moral autonomy, independent judgment, sovereignty of the individual, and self-ownership bear some similarity to Stirner's notion of ownness because they all focus on autonomous decision-making and behavior that is not constrained by governmental or ideological dictates. However, there are at least two significant differences that help clarify the uniqueness of Stirner's idea of ownness. First, unlike Stirner, each of the anarchist and libertarian thinkers mentioned here envision persons making choices according to a method or framework that has an absolute existence external to the person. Although Godwin and Rand are light years apart in the economic and political systems they sought to impose on individuals and society, they are together on the point that ethical individuals make decisions according to a fixed set of postulates. In Godwin's case, ethical behavior serves the collectivist ideal of the greater good. In Rand's case, ethical behavior is consistent with reason and the survival needs of "Man," a concept that she uses with considerable felicity. These are notions that Stirner ridiculed as fixed ideas when they appeared in the writings of his predecessors and contemporaries, including libertarians and anarchists such as Joseph-Pierre Proudhon and Peter Kropotkin both of whom appealed to the importance of morality to maintain social order and promote socialist ideals in a stateless society.<sup>18</sup>

Second, none of these notions of moral autonomy or self-ownership seem to entail the same level of commitment, activity, or effort inherent in ownness. As Stirner discusses ownness, the reader feels the tension, exertion, struggle, and sacrifice of the person as ownership is asserted over body, mind, and self in opposition to society, polity, and deity. Ownness is sensual and mental, internal and external, subjective and objective, in-itself and for-itself. It is more than the disembodied, rational exercises revered by the anarchists and libertarians intended to discover political justice, natural law, rational ethics, and social consensus. Ownness is a form of conviction that has a visceral, active, willful undergirding involving the entire being of the person: body, mind, and self. It is a form of commitment that appears much more dangerous to self and other than moral autonomy or self-ownership because it assumes no consensus or rational fit with moral absolutes or the actions of powerful others. Ownness offers no guaranteed solace, no *terminus* to conflict, oppression, sacrifice, or suffering. It is a concept that describes the behavior of persons, convinced of their uniqueness, seeking self-fulfillment in opposition to society, polity, and deity.

## SELF AND OTHER: THE UNIQUE ONE AND THE UNION OF EGOISTS

Stirner's discussions of modernity and ownness suggest that human beings have an inherent capacity to resist both direct and indirect forms of domination, or they suggest that there is some aspect of human beings that cannot be captured by social institutions and ideologies seeking to reduce persons to parts of collectivist constructs. Although he does not deal with the concept in a systematic way, Stirner refers to the "un-man" or the "un-human" in more than a dozen places in *The Ego and Its Own*. The un-man or un-human seems to have at least three meanings in Stirner's egoism. First, he uses the term as a way of describing what modernist ideologies, especially Christianity and humanism, choose to discard. In its search for essences, modernist thought makes judgments about what is essential and what is not, what matters to the collective and what does not. In some references in *The Ego and Its Own*, the un-human is the residual, what is left over. Second, the un-human refers to thoughts, behaviors, and characteristics of people that modernist thought chooses to deride or devalue; it is the object of "criticism" by liberals, socialists, and humanists. Stirner refers to selfishness, otherness, isolation, privacy, and rebellion as particularly important qualities that are derided by modernism. He identifies the "egoist" and the "devil" as labels that modernist ideologies frequently use to differentiate the "un-human" from the "human" valued by modernism. In this sense, Stirner acknowledges that "human" or humanity is also a symbol that has social control functions. It identifies not only what is sacred to humanity and society, but also what is deviant or profane. To the modernist, the un-human is a term of derision intended to vilify or discredit those thoughts and behaviors that challenge or undermine the collective, the modern, the rational.

Stirner's third use of the "un-human" is probably the most significant. It is the basis of his negation or rejection of humanity and society. He clearly uses the term to refer to the conscious deviance, profanity, and rebellious dimension of individuals.

What if the un-human, turning its back on itself with resolute heart, should at the same time turn away from the disturbing critic and leave him standing, untouched and unstung by his remonstrance? . . . I was contemptible because I sought my "better self" outside me; I was the un-human because I dreamed of the human. . . . But now I cease to appear to myself as the un-human, cease to measure myself and let myself be measured by man, cease to recognize anything above me.<sup>19</sup>

Stirner's unique one accepts the label "egoist," but he no longer accepts the criticism, loathing, and derogation implied by religious, liberal, social-

ist, and humanist critics. From the notion of the un-man or the un-human, Stirner begins to develop his concept of the unique one who not only embraces egoism as descriptive of his rejection of the collectivist constructs of modernity, but also rejects the measurement or comparison of self with the human, the humane, and the unselfish. The egoism he arrives at is not merely a negative response to Christianity, liberalism, socialism, and humanism, it is a reconstruction of rebellion that is founded on the uniqueness of the individual. Stirner's egoism rejects the notion that any aspect of the person can be discarded as "un-man" or "un-human" based on measurements, norms, or abstract comparisons of persons. The reifications of modernist religion, science, and philosophy prove to be little more than spooks or specters that have no referent anywhere "outside the head" of the modernist thinker. Thus, the un-human is the initial or incipient expression of the unique one. It is Stirner's dialectical reconstruction of the ego or the self. Modernist thought fails to capture the totality of the person. The un-human is transformed into the unique one through the assertion that the person is unique and, thus, without any valid norm or comparative measure.

The basic and clinical sciences of modernity, of course, seek to understand not the unique individual but the normalized representations of populations. The methods of the basic and clinical sciences are based on the search for homogeneity, not diversity, not individuality. The events or individuals who exist or behave outside specified standard deviations on the probability curve are anathema to the canons of modernist philosophy and science. The deviations, the outliers, or the residuals that do fit neatly within modernist paradigms or statistical models must be either mystified as irrational or unexplainable. Or, they are ignored because they fall outside acceptable confidence limits on the probability curve. Thus, the phenomena that Sigmund Freud attempted to categorize in the "Id" and George Herbert Mead attempted to categorize in the "I" are cast off as aggressive and irrational residuals since they speak to phases of individual behavior that cannot be captured or constrained by scientific models or institutional elites.<sup>20</sup> For Stirner, however, the un-human does not imply aggression or irrationality; it only implies what is discarded or marginalized by humanism and modernist forms of thinking. Ownness does not imply aggression or irrationality; it only implies that persons establish boundaries against ideologies and social systems that seek to destroy the differentiation between mine and thine, I and Thou, self and other.

Nor does the unique one imply aggression, irrationality, or superiority. Stirner includes a brief section entitled "The Unique One" at the end of *The Ego and Its Own*, but there are additional sections of the book that articulate this critical concept. Stirner's discussion of the unique one can be summarized in three points. First, the unique one is based on the idea that

the person has an autonomous, objective existence, a life and a self that are neither idealized nor alienated. The unique one's life and self are not just ideas created by any sort of external, supreme being. Moreover, the person has a life and a self that belong to him and no other. Of course, a life and a self are forms of property that the person can choose to alienate, but not the unique one. The unique one is an objective being, but also has a consciousness and will that assert ownership over his or her life and self. The unique one has both an in-itself and a for-itself reality. As Stirner says, "I am [myself] not merely in fact or being, but also for my consciousness, the unique."<sup>21</sup>

Second, the unique one is not a goal and has no calling and no destiny. For the unique one, living does not require that the person decide how to acquire life, meaning, and self. It only requires how to use it, consume it, squander it, or dissolve it. Living is ongoing action of consuming the time, energy, body, and property available to the person. The challenge that the person faces is not finding, discovering, or receiving a destiny concocted by others, but to decide how to live "oneself out."

Those who are hungering for the true life have no power over their present life, but must apply it for the purpose of thereby gaining that true life, and must sacrifice it entirely to this aspiration and this task. . . . In this view life exists only to gain life, and one lives only to make the essence of man alive in oneself, one lives for the sake of his essence. One has his life only in order to procure by means of it the true life cleansed of all egoism. Hence one is afraid to make any use he likes of his life: it is to serve only for the "right use."<sup>22</sup>

Stirner says that there is a difference between *longing* and *searching* for life, meaning, and self, and *possessing* life, meaning, and self. It is one thing to chase after an ideal or a dictate as a destiny, and quite another to use, consume, or dissolve one's life on an everyday basis. In the one case, the person has a goal, a calling, and a destiny cultivated and imposed by a powerful other intended to fulfill an idealized essence. In the other case, the person is not a goal, but a starting point who lives, enjoys, consumes, dissolves, and squanders his or her life and property. The unique one has no calling and no destiny. The unique one's purpose is self-assigned to live one's own life, or to develop self, not a "higher essence." "People have always supposed that they must give me a destiny lying outside myself, so that at last they demanded that I should lay claim to the human because I am a man." However,

I am unique. Hence my wants too are unique, and my deeds; in short, everything about me is unique. And it only as this unique I that I take everything for my own, as I set myself to work, and develop myself, only as this. I do not develop men, nor as man, but, as I, I develop myself.<sup>23</sup>



Third, Stirner insists that the unique one is more than “man” or “humanity,” not less. Stirner says that it is certainly possible for individuals to be more than “man” or humanity, but it is impossible for them to be less. The fixed ideas of modernity promote a normalization, commonality, and homogeneity that reduces persons and their behavior to the lowest common intellectual and behavioral denominator. The ideals of religion, philosophy, and science are not uplifting and do not inspire persons to be more than they are, happier than they are, smarter than they are, and more powerful than they are. The contrary is true, they browbeat persons into aspiring to be less than they are. But the unique one resists the modernist reduction of persons to abstract categories. “Look upon yourself as more powerful than they give you out for, and you have more power; look upon yourself as more, and you have more.”<sup>24</sup> The unique one is not a tool or vessel of ideas or gods, and refuses to exist for the development of humanity, a nation, a social class, or a race. Instead, the unique one “lives himself out, careless of how well or ill” ideologies, causes, or movements will fare as a consequence. Stirner taunts, “What, am I in the world to realize ideas?”<sup>25</sup> Clearly not, at least, the unique one is not in the world to realize ideas or some idealized image of self.

Not until I am certain of myself, and no longer seeking for myself, am I really my property; I have myself, therefore I use and enjoy myself. On the other hand, I can never take comfort in myself as long as I think that I have still to find my true self and that it must come to this, that not I but Christ or some other spiritual, ghostly, self lives in me.<sup>26</sup>

The unique one (a) owns his or her life, mind, body, and self; (b) rejects any external purpose, calling or destiny; (c) refuses to be an instrument for “higher powers” or “supreme beings”; and (d) knows and asserts self as unique. Stirner’s image of the unique individual who is defined by his or her chosen identity, which constitutes his or her property, may suggest the possibility of only very tenuous and precarious forms of social relationships. What does Stirner say about the relationships between and among persons? Is there any basis for reconstructing the self-other relationship in his thought?

Stirner was not only very critical of ideologies such as humanism and institutionalized power relations such as the state, he was also critical of society. He believed that macrolevel concepts of a nation or society tend to impose constraining and depersonalizing beliefs and identities upon individuals. Society subjects individuals to a plethora of constraints that undermine the person’s free choice and, consequently, oneness and property. In concert with many other social theorists, Stirner thus posited a fundamental conflict and opposition between society and the individual. But unlike other theorists, Stirner saw no need to reconcile the

two, or to resolve the contradiction in favor of society or a presumed reciprocity between society and the individual. In the social contract theories of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and modernist sociological theories of George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, and C. Wright Mills, the relationship between the individual and society is conceived as a reciprocal exchange in which both the person and society are allegedly able to force concessions from each other. Thus, each gives and receives from the relationship. In the case of the classical political theorists, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, the social contract assumed a chaotic and violent state of nature in which individuals risked assault, theft, and death because of the absence of institutionalized coercion that is sufficiently powerful to prevent interpersonal violence and theft. The deal between the individual and the society is that the state protects the person from internal and external threats and the person submits to the power and authority of the state.<sup>27</sup> Of the three, only Locke attempted to create a social contract that maintained some semblance of individuality and protection of the individual from the state. Hence, the right to life, liberty, and property. Hobbes's notion of Leviathan and Rousseau's notion of the General Will both subsume individuality, owncness, and property in the interest of political order and social welfare.

In the case of the classical sociological theorists, the fundamental social problem was also how to create and maintain social order. The early sociologists such as Auguste Comte and Émile Durkheim believed that order was the outcome of an authoritarian social system populated by compliant, malleable individuals who were not only subservient to the state but amenable to management by other social institutions and the values promoted by a scientific culture.<sup>28</sup> The American symbolic interactionist thinkers, Mead, Cooley, and Mills, understood the social contract as the outcome of a more interactive, mutual relationship between the individual and society. In the theories of all three, society is envisioned as an entity that emerges from the interactions of individuals. Mead based his notion of the social contract on symbolic interaction and the creation, by interacting individuals, of socially significant symbols, which have shared meanings. Mind, self, and society emerge from agreements among individuals about the meaning of symbols and, thus, their intended behaviors. Cooley argued that the self and society are twinborn and arise together; society is a fluid entity that presumably shifts as new entrants participate in it. Their contractual relations are as fluid but no less binding since they persist as shared "understandings." For Mills, the sociological imagination is the understanding that there is a living and essential interconnection between the individual and the society, personal biography and social history. Mills, of course, became a Castroite. The foundation of

his authoritarian reconstruction of sociology is the placement of “society” on the same conceptual plane as the individual.<sup>29</sup>

In the case of each of these political and social theorists, the social contract is founded on the belief, or the metaphor, that a violent and meaningless presocial state of nature prompts individuals to contract with each other or social institutions to provide for order, structure, and meaning in their everyday lives. In opposition to all forms of social contract theory, Stirner argues that the “state of nature” is not an egoistic *bellum omnium contra omnia*, but a structured, institutionalized, collectivized existence in which state, society, and culture predate the birth and interaction of the person. For Stirner, society *is* the state of nature. It is nonsense to speak of a contract that no one living ever agreed to. It is nonsense to speak of the twinborn nature of the relationship between the individual and society, or the notion that language, meanings, and culture are negotiated among persons on an everyday basis. Individuals are not “born free” and subsequently enslaved by society. They are born into a society with preexisting and powerful institutional controls over language, thought, and behavior. Human beings do not “enter” into society as an equal partner with interactions governed by contracts or norms of reciprocity. Regardless of the sociohistorical circumstances, the relationship between the individual and society is a struggle from the beginning over the ownership of the person’s life, self, liberty, and property. Stirner reframes the relationship between the individual and society as a conflict over ownership or ownness, and not as much over the constraints on the person’s liberty imposed by Leviathan or the General Will. Of course, individual liberty is constrained by society and all forms of social relationships, but the primary conflict is over the efforts by society to appropriate the individual’s “ownness” or property: Every society intends to appropriate the person’s body, mind, and self. Every society seeks the person’s subservience and the relinquishing of his or her ownness. Human existence is characterized by the struggle of the person, or the unique one, against the external appropriation of property.<sup>30</sup>

Society also arises and evolves through the interaction of individuals, of course. But relationships become organizations. Institutions acquire coercive authority structures that enforce norms and roles. Society degenerates into a “fixidity” in which the voluntary union of individuals comes to a “standstill.” Stirner differentiates between those social relationships or organizations that individuals are born into or coerced into, and those that they join consciously and willfully. This distinction clarifies that the egoist or the unique one is not the isolated, nihilistic misanthrope described by his harshest critics, including Marx, Paterson, and Löwith. In opposition to the type of social bond that is external and eternally constraining upon persons, Stirner identifies the “union of egoists,” which

may constrain the liberty or negative freedom of individuals, but it is primarily characterized by ownness or the self-ownership of the individuals who belong to it. Society is preexisting and predetermining. The union of egoists is the outcome of the work of its participants. It is their creation, product, and property. The union of egoists is Stirner's concept of a willed, voluntary, for-itself social relationship that is continuously created and renewed by all who own and support it through acts of will.

The union of egoists implies that all parties participate in the organization through a conscious egoism, or a self-conscious self-determination. Significantly, the most important relationship in this union of egoists is the relationship of the individual to self. Stirner argues that the dialectical egoist participating in a union of egoists dissolves society and all coercive relationships by interpreting self as the subject of all of his or her relationships with others. The relationship of the individual to self, participating in the union of egoists, is a "creative nothingness" in which the person creates and understands self as a subject, appropriating, and consuming both his or her life and relationships as property, for his or her own enjoyment.

I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this "human society." I sacrifice nothing to it. I only utilize it; but to be able to utilize it completely I transform it rather into my property and my creature; that is, I annihilate it, and form in its place the union of egoists.<sup>31</sup>

Stirner's view of ownness, self-ownership, and the unique ego structure his understanding of social relationships, critique of society, and the countersociety or counterculture he suggests with the notion of the union of egoists. What specifically characterizes the union of egoists is not the "measure of liberty" it would offer, but the characteristic that its members would keep only themselves "before their eyes" and not view the organization as a "sovereign power" fulfilling some "higher purpose," "sacred duty," or "historical destiny." The union of egoists is constituted by relationships that are owned by its participants as the property of unique individuals. The union of egoists cannot be founded on ideas or principles that externalize the decisions and convictions of individuals. Instead, the union of egoists grounds alienation and reification to nothing. It "antiquates" society and all principles that promote social relationships or interaction not based on ownness.

Stirner contrasts relationships and organizations based on ideology, or abstract concepts such as justice, love, mercy, pity, and kindness, with the union of egoists based on ownness, enjoyment, and selfishness. Unlike other forms of property, he argues that the union of egoists demands *reciprocity* because desiderata and concessions can only be won and bought from others in relationships founded on ownness, enjoyment, and self-interest. In the union of egoists, the person has some leverage over others

and can affect the outcomes of interaction. In other types of organizations, the person is at a disadvantage from the start. For example, how does the person obtain kindness, love, mercy, pity, or justice in an organization based on those principles? How does one obtain kindness or love, or any other form of desiderata that cannot exist on the basis of reciprocal exchange? The production and exchange of kindness, love, or justice is entirely at the discretion of others. These are gifts that are provided at the pleasure of others. In the case of love, mercy, or pity:

The affectionate one's service can be had only by begging, be it by my lamentable appearance, by my need of help, my misery, my suffering. What can I offer him for his assistance? Nothing! I must accept it as a present.<sup>32</sup>

It is only in the union of egoists that the individual has some control or ability to affect the outcomes of others in the organization. It is only within the union of egoists that the needs of individuals can be met in a reciprocal, voluntary manner.

You bring into a union your whole power, your competence, and make yourself count; in a society you are employed, with your working power; in the former you live egoistically, in the latter humanly, that is, religiously, as a "member in the body of this Lord"; to a society you owe what you have, and are in duty bound to it; . . . a union you utilize, and give it up undutifully and unfaithfully when you see no way to use it further.<sup>33</sup>

Unions of egoists are not more than the individuals who comprise them, they are only instruments that exist "for you and through you." They are neither natural nor spiritual entities, but fields where individuals own and possess relationships, and make use of them to meet their needs, interests, and desires. "In short, the society is *sacred*, the union your *own*; the society consumes you, you consume the union."<sup>34</sup>

Stirner's contrast of society and the union of egoists strikes at the heart of basic philosophical questions about the nature and purpose of social organization and culture. How are social organizations, which are characterized by the reciprocity that the classical theorists sought, created and what purposes do they serve? Are they created and maintained by living, acting individuals who benefit from their membership, or are they preexisting serving the interests of the reified organization or an elite within it? Further, what sort of legitimacy do preexisting, reified organizations have? What is the source of their legitimacy? Can they have any sort of legitimacy if they are not created, maintained, and transformed by living, acting persons who benefit from their membership? If society and culture are not created and maintained by their participants, and do not serve their needs and interests, what sort of loyalty and obedience can they legitimately

claim? If society and social organizations are not reciprocal, as defined by the persons who inhabit them, can they claim any legitimacy?

Stirner's concept of the union of egoists is primarily a critique of the fact and the ideology that society and social organizations are external and constraining entities that place individuals in a state of relative powerlessness and do not operate on the basis of reciprocity. For Stirner, the union of egoists is based in the idea that bonds and relationships are created at the pleasure of persons and exist to serve persons. The union of egoists is a concept that Stirner uses to contrast an organization based on his concepts of ownness and property with those based on self-renunciation and dispossession. He uses the notion as a rallying cry to help repair or reconstruct the social relationships that modernity damaged.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT: THE STATE, THE PRESS, AND THE MARKET

In Stirner's discussions of ownness, the unique one, and the union of egoists, a clear dialectic between what is *conferred* by a powerful other and what is *appropriated* by the individual emerges as the most important dynamic of life. This dialectic also profoundly shapes his view of the state and political processes in modernity. One of the most significant features of modernist politics is the centrality of the notion of rights, which, Stirner argues, is the foundation for political power and legitimacy in the modern world. With the victory of the bourgeoisie and political liberalism, the interaction of the state and society began to gravitate around claims regarding the rights of individuals, collectivities, the state, and the nation. The privileges and prerogatives associated with the feudal period were converted into rights. There were two significant consequences of the transformation of the system of privileges and prerogatives into rights. First, the social practice of the state conferring desiderata in the form of exclusive privileges and prerogatives upon the aristocracy changed to a practice in which the state acquired authority to confer rights on all. The system of privileges and prerogatives was abolished in favor of an "equality of rights." Second, as political rights were extended to all, the nature of the state changed from a *limited monarchy*, in which the privileges and prerogatives of the aristocrats constrained the behavior of the monarch, to an *absolute democracy*, in which the state acquired absolute power and authority to define and enforce the rights of individuals, groups, the nation, and the state itself.

What was longed for and striven for through thousands of years—namely, to find that absolute lord beside whom no other lords and lordlings any longer

exist to clip his power—the bourgeoisie has brought to pass. It has revealed the Lord who alone confers “rightful titles,” and without whose warrant *nothing is justified*.<sup>35</sup>

The meaning of “equality of rights” is shaped by the absolutist powers the state acquired under the rule of the bourgeoisie and political liberalism. The slogan ultimately means that the state has no “regard for my person,” that individuals have no “significance that commands its deference.” Persons make “no difference” to the state. Particular interests, needs, qualities, and motivations count for nothing. Each has access to the rights conferred by the state as long as she or he complies with or fulfills the obligations that spring from them. What really matters is that the state is without competition or challenge from either individuals or other social institutions regarding what constitutes “right” and who has access to rights.

“Right” also has meanings as far as individuals are concerned. Individuals have “a sense of right,” that may not be congruent with the “sense of right” promulgated by state and society. Stirner differentiates between the rights granted by the state as “foreign rights” and the person’s sense of right as “my right.” Foreign rights, the rights promulgated by the state and society, are concepts of right that individuals and groups seek to impose on others. “Contests of rights” are struggles to impose particular conceptions of right that are characterized by both coercion and “the dominion of mind,” the ideological constructs intended to pacify resistance.

When the revolution stamped equality as a “right,” it took flight into the religious domain, into the region of the sacred, of the ideal. Hence, since then, the fight for the “sacred, inalienable rights of man.” Against the “eternal rights of man” the “well-earned rights of the established order” are quite naturally, and with equal right, brought to bear: right against right, where of course one is decried by the other as “wrong.”<sup>36</sup>

Thus, rights are relative to circumstances and who has the power to impose or assert them. What constitutes a right is extremely nebulous and dependent upon human beings for its identification, promotion and dominance against all other possible conceptions. While participants in the contest of rights make all sorts of appeals to “divine rights” and “natural rights,” the reality is that right is the outcome of a social contest involving force and ideology. Divine rights and natural rights are thought to have an eternal existence in some suprahuman realm. But even these need human beings to identify what they are and to champion their imposition on individuals and society.

What really matters in the contest of rights is who has the power to impose a particular conception of right. “Your right is not more powerful if you are not more powerful.”<sup>37</sup>

As human right is always something given, it always in reality reduces to the right which we give, "concede," to each other. If the right to existence is conceded to new-born children, then they have the right; if it is not conceded to them, as was the case among the Spartans and the ancient Romans, then they do not have it. For only society can give or concede it to them; they themselves cannot take it, or give it to themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Stirner challenges his readers to simply declare that people in despotic nations have rights, such as the Chinese, the Russians, and children in many cultures. The declaration evaporates. The declaration of rights in itself is meaningless, an illusion, a spook unless there is the power and practical activity to impose or realize them. The stark fact of the matter to Stirner is that persons have the right to be what they have the power to be. They do not have the right to anything they cannot obtain. All rights are derived from the person's abilities, power, and practical activities, not the divine and not nature. Persons are entitled to, or have a right to, everything that they have in their power. Foreign rights are imposed by others, or rights that the person has not given to self nor taken by self. Stirner does not argue that "might makes right." He argues that might precedes right. There is no right without might, much like ownness is a necessary precondition for freedom. "He who has power has right."<sup>39</sup> There must be a deliberate and physical assertion of right for it to exist or to matter. It must be appropriated or taken by the person. The state declares and asserts foreign rights that may or may not free or nurture the individual. The rights asserted by the individual, regardless of their consequences, are at least assertions of rights that are owned by the person.

The absolutist state attempts to eradicate "my right," or the rights and will asserted by the person. The absolutist state cannot accept any competing or alternative declaration and assertion of rights. The absolutist state claims that it alone has the prerogative and privilege to determine and enforce the distribution of desiderata, including right. The contest of rights exists only within the state's policy process. Any contest over rights that exist outside the state is a direct threat to the power and legitimacy of the state. Therefore, the unique one or a union of egoists cannot demand any rights, nor can they recognize any rights. The demand for rights or the demand for desiderata of any sort, is also a recognition of the right of the state to act as the sole arbiter of right and desiderata. It is an acquiescence to the state's claim to the exclusive use of legitimate force. As the absolute arbiter of right, the state imposes a duty on persons to do nothing that conflicts with the interests and legitimacy of the state, and to do everything that supports the interests and legitimacy of the state. Lordship and servitude are both essential components of the state. It is not enough that the state has a master, or a structure of power and an ideology that legitimates it. The state also needs servants, who create and



maintain lordship through their submission. Stirner says that governments last only as long as there is a ruling will that is viewed as tantamount to the will of people. The will of the lord is law, but what does the law amount to if no one obeys it? If obedience and submission ceased, lordship and the state would disappear. But the demand for rights is an important characteristic of servitude and, thus, an important act of submission to a powerful other.

Stirner uses two examples to aid his discussion of the centrality and transformation of rights in the modernist, absolutist state: the freedom of the press and economic competition, or free trade. Stirner argues that the bourgeoisie and political liberalism brought a conception of liberty in which individuals were not intended to be forced to perform the will of another. However, personal freedom also means "being only so free that no other person can dispose of mine, or that what I may or may not do does not depend on the personal decree of another."<sup>40</sup> But the personal freedom of modernity turns into its opposite, a dependence of persons on the granting of freedom or liberty by the law or the state. The liberty of the press is an example of the type of freedom elevated by political liberalism. The notion of liberty of the press challenges only the coercion of "the censorship as that of personal willfulness, but otherwise showing itself extremely inclined and willing to tyrannize over the press by press laws." The "civic liberals" of modernity want freedom of the press for themselves and know that as "law-abiding" citizens, they will not be in conflict with the law. Liberalism has no problem with "liberal matter, only lawful matter" being printed. If the personal liberty of the civic liberals is assured, it is difficult for those subjected to liberal ideology to see how "the most glaring unfreedom becomes dominant." While political liberalism, the nascent form of advanced modernity, abolished intrusion by persons and groups into the right of the press to publish what it sees fit, it becomes "so much more submissive to the law. One is enthralled now in due legal form."<sup>41</sup>

Stirner argues that political liberalism is the last attempt at a creation of the liberty of the people, or of society. Political liberalism is a decaying dream of a state that protects individual liberty, a dream that individual liberty and an absolutist state can be reconciled. It is a dream that was superseded by socialism and humanism. The cry for "freedom of the press" is a contradictory, or halfway argument for liberty that subordinates the press to the state and its laws, and functions to reinforce the power of the state over the thoughts and behaviors of individuals. To be consistent, advocacy for freedom of the press must also be advocacy for the freedom of the individual. Stirner initiates his argument by asking, what is the press to be liberated from? What is it to be rid of? Certainly freedom of the press implies freedom from a dependence and obligation to serve capital, the community, and the state. But it is "everyone's affair"

to seek their liberation from dependence and servitude. When persons liberate themselves from such dependence and servitude generally, they have specifically freed themselves to compose, write, print, and distribute what is significant to them. What individuals compose, print, and distribute is their "own" and what they "will," instead of being the result of constraints and dictates of some external power. The press can only become "free from" what individuals are "free from." If persons liberate themselves from the law, the state, and the sacred, their published words also become free. A free press cannot exist in an environment in which persons are not free. As Stirner says, "the press does not become free from what I am not free from."<sup>42</sup> The struggle for a free press must become part of the struggle for ownness and individual freedom.

If the press is free, then nothing is as important to its liberation as a challenge to every sort of constraint that could be put on it in the name of the law. If the press is free, that is, "owned" by individuals, they need no permission from the state for employing or consuming it. The press, including its contents, is the property of unique individuals from the moment nothing is more to them than themselves. From the moment individuals choose to own their thoughts and behaviors, the state and its laws cease to have authority over the press. The press is owned by persons as soon as persons are their own, as self-owned persons. Political liberalism intends nothing further than to liberate the press from personal and arbitrary interferences of the powerful, but freedom of the press really means that the press also has to be free from the laws and will of the state.<sup>43</sup> The clamor of political liberalism for freedom of the press is contradictory since the state, the one institution that can effectively constraint their liberty, is sacred even to them. Stirner argues that freedom of the press means that the press must become free from the state, or clear of the state and the press laws. If freedom of the press is a mere petition for permission to publish, it presupposes the state as the sole legitimate arbiter of behavior. It leaves the relationship between the state and the press untouched. The press can expect only a present, permission, or charter. A petition for permission is something quite different from an rejection or insurrection against the authority and the power of the state to either constrain the press or to confer permission to publish.

Stirner assures his reader that he is not an opponent of the liberty of the press, but he asserts that it cannot happen if the vision is only for the state to grant permission to the press. The struggle for the freedom of the press is one component of the broader struggle for individual freedom and dignity which includes an insurrection against the ability of the state to intrude into the behaviors of persons and groups.

Stirner makes a similar argument in his analysis of economic competition. When Stirner was writing *The Ego and Its Own* in the early 1840s, the

term “capitalism” was not used to describe the economic system that accompanied the rise of political liberalism. The terms “capital” and “capitalist” had been used prior to 1844 in the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the political philosophy of Proudhon, but it was not until the mid-1850s that “capitalism” was used to describe an economic system based on monetary exchange, the private ownership of property, and market-based competition. Marx and Engels did not use “capitalism” in *The Communist Manifesto*, which was first published in 1848. It was not until Marx published the first volume of *Capital* in 1867 that the term capitalism was used to describe an economic system.<sup>44</sup> Although Stirner does not use the term “capitalism,” he describes the economic system he calls “free competition,” which would later be called free market or “laissez-faire capitalism.” He examines free competition from his dialectical egoist perspective. Since he is interested in the role of the state in social life, he poses the question, “is free competition really free?” Or, in what sense is competition free?

Stirner analyzes the roots of free competition in the both the rise of the bourgeoisie and political liberalism. He argues that an “extraordinarily large gain” was made when the feudal and guild systems were destroyed throughout Europe and North America. The most significant change that occurred with the overthrow of the feudal state was that governments became more tolerant and less parsimonious in granting property rights and “concessions” enabling individuals to open businesses. In some very important respects commerce opened up with the dissolution of feudalism, providing individuals with more opportunities to produce and exchange goods and services. The free competition that was unleashed in Europe and North America was engendered by the revolutions that destroyed monarchy and the aristocracy, thereby emancipating the middle classes, or the commonalty. The basic principle of the bourgeois revolutions and reforms was equality before the law. In economics, this means that no one is barred from competition, that each person has the value of other individuals, and no one can count on any favoritism or privilege from the state. What the bourgeois revolutionaries and reformists propounded as the principle of equality was realized in the economic realm as free competition. As far as the state is concerned, all are “simple individuals.” As far as society is concerned, all are competitors. Each may aspire and work to reach higher rungs in the social ladder, soaring above them,” even by “overthrowing and exploiting” others for his own advantage, and “depriving them of their favorable circumstances.” Free competition originated in persons becoming free of all personal rule and “means nothing else than that everyone can present himself, assert himself, fight, against another.”<sup>45</sup>

Under the regime of free competition, and in the meritocratic ideology that supports it, some will succeed and others will fail, or be left behind.

The assumption underlying the legitimacy of the resulting inequality is that everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to succeed. The success of some and failure of others is due to the competence and motivation, or personal qualities of the individuals competing. The image is that all forms of bias are absent in the regime of free competition. The image is that the state, or the political process, is a detached, disinterested observer of the economic process, refusing to intrude in the competition of each against all. Stirner's economic critique received almost no commentary subsequent to the final judgment by Marx and Engels that he was a mere petit-bourgeois whose narrow perspective was surpassed by history. However, he had a deep interest in political economy and class inequality. He translated the writings of Adam Smith and Jean-Baptiste Say into German. He planned a critical analysis of both as a companion to their translations, which was intended to help sharpen the critique of free competition presented in *The Ego and Its Own*. In fact, Stirner rejected the reality and ideology of free competition as antithetical to the notions of ownness, the unique one, and the union of egoists. His critique of free competition is also the basis of his analysis of the evolving theories of socialism and communism that promoted the revolutionary overthrow of the regime of free competition.

The notion that the state is a disinterested observer in the economy and not an active participant is a fiction, even in a society dominated by liberal ideology. Stirner suggests four reasons why free competition is not really free. First, the state determines what constitutes property, who owns it, and who is qualified to compete. Stirner argues that "private property lives by the grace of the law." Mere possession is transformed into property, or made legitimate, by the law, political power, or the state. In fact, the state is the sole proprietor. As long as there is a state, there is no property that belongs to the individual in any absolute sense. Competition, then, is not really free as long as the state ultimately owns and controls the products and labor that persons intend to exchange. Regardless of the particulars of its intervention, the state sets the parameters, or the "thousand barriers" under which competition occurs. Moreover, the state further limits competition by determining who can compete and what can be exchanged. Stirner notes that governments control markets by setting standards that determine who can serve in occupations and by specifying the characteristics of products and services that can be sold.

Second, free and open competition is an empty freedom for those who do not have the "materials" or capital to compete. The ability to compete and succeed is significantly determined by the person's possession of productive property. Under the regime of free competition, the state does not object to persons competing, but this is an empty right when persons do not have access to the "things for competition." Frequently, the per-

son's possession of property has nothing to do with their competence, motivation, or effort. Instead it is the result of accident, luck, birth, factors the individual has no control over. Success and the ability to compete may be due more to who has access to the materials or capital, than to who has the competence and motivation to succeed. Since the state has significant control over the distribution of materials, it actually has significant control over who can compete and succeed. Free competition is not "free," because many individuals lack the things for competition.<sup>46</sup>

Third, even in a free market economy, the state supports and protects exploitation by protecting property rights. The regime of free competition pretends to guarantee freedom, voluntary participation, meritocracy, and fairness, but it is actually a form of exploitation that the state supports and protects. The differences in wages and wealth that emerge in "free competition" are not clearly related to the value that the producers or consumers attribute to them. Instead, they are due to capricious decisions made by manufacturers. Their power to set wages and prices is unearned and supported by the state's protection of private property. The value created by those at the top of the social hierarchy is not demonstrably superior to that created by those at the bottom, but it has the appearance of superiority because of the legitimacy conferred by the government. Speaking to the manufacturers and the government that protects them, Stirner offers a harsh and surprising condemnation of capitalist exploitation,

We distress ourselves twelve hours in the sweat of our face, and you offer us a few groschen for it. Then take the like for your labor too. Are you not willing? You fancy that our labor is richly repaid with that wage, while yours on the other hand is worth a wage of many thousands. But, if you did not rate yours so high, and gave us a better change to realize value from ours, then we might well, if the case demanded it, bring to pass still more important things than you do for the many thousand thalers; and, if you got only such wages as we, you would soon grow more industrious in order to receive more.<sup>47</sup>

Far from the petite-bourgeois reactionary he is frequently made out to be, Stirner is critical of the regime of free competition because he understands that it cannot help but promote pauperism and subordination to the state.

The state does not let me come to my value, and continues in existence only through my valuelessness: it is forever intent on *getting benefit* from me, exploiting me, turning me to account, using me up. . . . It wants me to be "its creature."<sup>48</sup>

Fourth, the quality of life and labor, the quality of goods and services, is cheapened when the motivation for production is profit, and not excellence or the enjoyment of one's activity. Stirner contrasts egoistic labor, or activity that is enjoyable and meaningful to the individual, with labor that

is done "on account of the gain that it yields," or that notion of work that is motivated by necessity, coercion, or pursuit of advantage over others. It is a contrast of the type of human labor dictated by society, economy, and polity against labor understood as the activity of the egoistic, unique individual who does things for self. The labor under the regime of free competition is not labor understood as for-itself activity, but labor that is directed by external dynamics and alien goals. "With competition is connected less the intention to do the thing *best* than the intention to make it as *profitable*, as productive, as possible."<sup>49</sup> The critique Stirner offers about the nature of work under the regime of free competition is a remarkable anticipation of the distinction Marx would articulate seventeen years later in *Capital* between *use value* and *exchange value*. The "bitter life" and "bitter poverty" of everyday work under the regime of free competition is a consequence of the statist domination of economic life. Ultimately, the emphasis on profit and accumulation yields little that benefits individuals. It promotes a "restless acquisition" that frustrates all attempts at "calm enjoyment." There is simply "no comfort of our possessions."

Stirner's immanent critique of the philosophy of right unmasks the shibboleths of modernity and political liberalism, especially the notions of the free press and laissez-faire economics. He demonstrates that the notion of "right," while presented as an inviolable realm in which the person is protected and nurtured by the state, actually empowers the state and manufactures the "valuelessness" of the person. His immanent critique influenced individualist anarchism in the late nineteenth century, but it is a much deeper analysis than the anarchistic opposition between the state and individual liberty. This is due to the centrality of ownness in Stirner's thought. The individual has a need to own mind, self, and body, but the state needs to promote subordination through coercion and fixed ideas. In opposition to the union of egoists, which is founded on voluntary participation and free choice, the state is the enemy and murderer of ownness. The state and the individual are implacable enemies. In the modern world, the state demonstrates its enmity and hostility to the egoist by demanding that the person realize a fixed idea of what it means to be human, a citizen, or a worker in thought and behavior. Under the domination by the liberal state, the person is an abstraction, a spirit, an abstracted essence, and empty category. The state cannot allow individuals to be egoists, but only good citizens and compliant workers. It requires humility, respect, and, ultimately, impotence before its power and authority. It necessarily entails lordship and bondage. Regardless of its form, the state negates ownness or the will of the individual just as it elevates collective identities and interests. There is no possibility of reconciling the egoist and the state since the egoist must annihilate or dissolve the state in order to live as an owner, while the state must annihilate or dissolve the egoist to maintain its power and legitimacy.

### FORMS OF RESISTANCE: INSURRECTION AGAINST REVOLUTION

It is significant that Stirner developed his critique of state power in the historical context of the democratic, socialist, and communist revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially since these revolutions all promised to extend human rights and to ensure the full participation of each individual in the political process. Each promised to overcome alienation through the application of state power in society and in the lives of individuals. Stirner is a critic of these revolutions, as well as the old regimes they destroyed, because they ensured the return of old forms of alienation and repression in their attempt to overcome them. Prefiguring Marx, Stirner made the distinction between the bourgeois and the citizen, but he used it to arrive at completely opposite conclusions from the socialists and communists. In *The Ego and Its Own*, Stirner says that it is not the individual or the real person who has been liberated by revolution, but only the citizen as a *species*, the category of political liberalism. In the French Revolution, for example, it was not the individual who was active as a world-historical figure; only the nation-state of France.

For Stirner, the democracy of the liberal and socialist revolutions is the modern political expression of alienation and repression. Even though liberalism and socialism entailed philosophies of rights and freedoms, and a rejection of tyranny and religious mystification, they reconstructed political domination in new forms. The democratic revolutions, for example, freed individuals from the caprice and arbitrary rule of despots, replacing despotism with laws and rational rules that allow individuals access to the state. However, democratic liberalism also strengthens the state's power over individuals and society. Political freedom in the democratic republic means that the state has more freedom and power to subjugate individuals. It has a greater ability to annihilate and dissolve the egoist.

The socialist revolutions and, later, the communist revolutions elevated "society," "social class," and "the state" as new fixed ideas and new agents of domination. The enforced homogenization of socialist and communist rule promotes society as the new supreme being demanding the sacrifice of the person's thoughts, loyalties, and resources. The formation of collective social identities in socialist and communist ideology and practice is no less oppressive than the freedom of the liberal state or the despotism of pre-democratic political structures. This point is at the core of the conflict between Stirner and the socialists and communists who exalt revolution as the political means of achieving collectivist and statist political goals. Socialist and communist ideology and practice negate oneness and the will of the individual. All legitimate forms of community, union, and association in Stirner's dialectical egoism result from, or are the product of, the

thoughts and behaviors of individual egoists. They are deliberate constructions by egoists. In dialectical egoist thought, the individual becomes a political subject only through opposition to and struggle against collectivities and the state. For the socialists and communists, the individual only becomes a political subject and potentially free only as a proletarian uniting with other proletarians within an authoritarian political party to seize state power and to use its technologies of violence and propaganda to suppress political opposition. For the socialists and communists, individuals have no political meaning. They become significant actors only as members of a disciplined, authoritarian collectivity. Foreshadowing Marxist theory, Stirner's critique of the collectivism of socialism and communism emphasizes the point that workers only begin to seek their freedom once they form as a class-for-itself; their freedom culminates in the formation of an absolute state. For Stirner, it is a bit of barbarous irony that socialists and communists conceive of freedom as the deprivation of the individual of all ownness, property, independent thought, and personal judgment. For the socialists and communists, freedom is ragamuffinism.

Both socialism and communism emanate from social liberalism. Stirner's critique of them emanates from his critique of social liberalism. However, both socialism and communism proceed in their critique of class inequality from a notion of right and human welfare. However, the notion of right in socialist and communist ideology departs from that of political liberalism and free competition in that it is associated with the "welfare" of society and the rights of collectivities. In their nascent forms, socialist and communist thought argued for the collectivization of property so that the material needs of all persons could be met. The subjectivity of needs and conflict over the scope and priority of needs prompted collectivist thinkers, such as Proudhon and Weitling, to abandon references to individual needs and the welfare of persons in favor of the needs and welfare of society. Stirner sympathizes with aspects of the critique of free competition that Proudhon and Weitling espouse, but abhors their political and social agenda. In reference to Weitling he says that "communism rightly revolts against the pressure that I experience from individual proprietors; but still more horrible is the might that it puts in the hands of the collectivity." According to socialist and communist ideology, the state, commune, or collectivity should be the proprietor. For the dialectical egoist, on the contrary, "I am the proprietor, and I only come an understanding with others about my property." Instead of being abolished, property must "be torn from [the] ghostly hands" of society and the state and become the property of the individual. The social and political questions about class inequality and the distribution of property cannot resolved "amicably as the socialists, yes, even the communists, dream. It is solved only by the war of all against all. The poor become free and proprietors only when they rebel, rise up."<sup>50</sup>



Stirner's critique of democratic liberalism, socialism, and communism extends to his views on revolution, rebellion, and change. Fundamental to his perspective on political organization and change is the argument that revolution and rebellion, while related, are vastly different concepts and historical processes. Revolution contradicts the notion of ownness, demands self-renunciation in favor of collectivist abstractions. Rebellion or insurrection is a more consistent form of political expression for the unique one. Revolution aims at the overturning of social and political conditions or the transformation of existing social and political conditions. It involves the coordinated activities of thousands of people acting through political organizations to achieve goals that are fixed in a philosophy of an improved condition of society. Revolution is therefore a political and social act that seeks the acquisition of state power, the overturning of social conditions, and the rearrangement of society. The time and talent of revolutionaries are consumed with the design and struggle over the appropriate arrangement of the transformed society.

The egoist is also the enemy of the state but does not seek the acquisition of state power or the transformation of society. Instead of "making arrangements," Stirner argues that the insurrectionist is concerned with "rising or exalting himself" above the state and existing social conditions. Rebellion or insurrection also produces the transformation of established social conditions, but it differs from revolution in that it does not start with that intent. Transformation is not the intention but rather an unavoidable consequence of rebellion, which begins with the discontent of individuals with themselves and their interaction with the world. While revolution leads to new arrangements, rebellion leads us "no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves." It is not really a fight to replace the established order, but if it spreads an insurrection ensures that the established order collapses on its own. The objective of rebellion or insurrection is the elevation of the individual above the established order since the purposes and actions of the person are not political nor social, but egoistic. Rebellion is a "standing up" or a "straightening oneself up" to the state and society, and a "standing with" others who also rebel against the state and society. Revolution requires the individual to make new arrangements for the new social order by submitting to the demands of a party, movement, and cause. Rebellion demands nothing, but implies that the individual rises up or exalts self against alien, external powers. Instead of working to design and implement an ideal political formation that demands absolute obedience, the insurgent strives to become "constitution-less." In rebellion, the individual asserts ownership and discovers his or her uniqueness. "I no longer humble myself before any power, and I recognize that all powers are only my power. All powers that dominate me I then reduce to serving me."<sup>51</sup>

Stirner's dialectical egoism conceives all political systems to be social constructions that arise under specific historical circumstances because of the weakness of the old regime and the strength of the opposition. They acquire and maintain power through coercion and ideological tools that promote the virtues of self-renunciation and the grandeur of supra-individual constructs. Without foundation in the material world, the fixed ideas become prisons for the mind and the will. They conceal from the individual the existence of his or her own infinite creative powers. All systems and systemizing tendencies of the modern world must be resisted by unique individuals, and through that resistance, destroyed. The political project of dialectical egoism is not the replacement of one socio-political order with another, but the rebellion of individuals against each of them. Revolutions succeed in creating new social formations, new states, new social orders, new fixed ideas, but they do not emancipate individuals. Stirner argued that ownness differs from freedom, and self-liberation differs from external emancipation. Similarly, insurrection differs from and precedes revolution. Although external circumstances are frequently replete with conflicts and contradictions, the epicenter of change is internal to the individual. Change proceeds through the negation of fixed ideas and the assertion of ownership over mind, self and body. It emanates externally through individual actions that challenge external constraints, seeking fulfillment and reciprocity through the union of egoists. It is only through insurrection, or the rebellion against systems *because they are systems*, can individuals overcome the subordination inherent in idolatry and authority and, thereby, own their minds, selves, and bodies.

After the initial sensation and backlash *The Ego and Its Own* received in the 1840s, the concepts and ideas within it remained largely dormant until the 1870s when two young journalists named Benjamin R. Tucker and James L. Walker discovered Stirner's work in a quest to master the array of anarchist and egoist thought. Tucker arguably became the most important individualist anarchist thinker in America and Europe. Walker published the first book in English on egoism. Shortly after the turn of the century, another journalist and activist named Dora Marsden also developed an interest in Stirner. The efforts of the three to articulate a philosophy of individualism by applying aspects of Stirner's egoism to political, economic, and social problems in America and Europe are examined in part 2.

## NOTES

1. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (1844; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 165.

2. Did Stirner intend to use “the unique one” and “the union of egoists” as transcendental concepts meaning that they could be applied to the critique of a variety of sociohistorical circumstances? Stirner certainly treats the unique one and the union of egoists as transcendental concepts and counterposes them to the realities of modernity. Thus, he adopts a form of transcendental critique.

3. See Richard Schacht, “Hegel on Freedom,” in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair McIntyre (1972; repr., South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1976), 289–328 for a nice summary of the importance of freedom in Hegel’s philosophy. For a summary and application of Hegel’s notion of freedom in social research see John F. Welsh, “The Unchained Dialectic: Theory and Research in an Era of Educational Reform,” in *Neoliberalism and Educational Reform*, ed. Wayne Ross and Rich Gibson (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007): 217–35.

4. Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays* (1969; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166–217.

5. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 143.

6. John Milton, “Areopagitica,” in *Complete Poems and Major Prose* (1644; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002), 716–49.

7. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 142.

8. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 143.

9. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (1821; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 140.

10. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 141–54.

11. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 149.

12. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 147.

13. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 151–52.

14. Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 13–39.

15. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 271.

16. See William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 90–96; Stephen Pearl Andrews, *Science of Society: The True Constitution of Government in the Sovereignty of the Individual as the Final Development of Protestantism, Democracy, and Socialism* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1852); and Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 3–18.

17. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 13–39. Also see Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* (1957; repr., New York: New American Library, 1996), 930–32 for a brief but helpful summary of her argument that independent reasoning is the essence of what it means to be a human being and an ethical person. Murray Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (1982; repr., New York: New York University Press, 2002), 45–47. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 26–53.

18. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property?* (1849; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (New York: Dover, 2002).

19. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 131.

20. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920; repr., Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2008), and George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (1934; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

21. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 318
22. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 284–85
23. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 318–19
24. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 318
25. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 318
26. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 283.
27. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89–90; John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (1689; repr., Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005), 72–77; and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (1762; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 50.
28. Auguste Comte, *Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 47–145 and Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1997), 319–20.
29. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 71–72, 268–69; Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902; repr., New York: Scribner's, 1922), 126–68; and C. W. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3–24.
30. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 271.
31. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 161.
32. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 275.
33. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 277.
34. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 277.
35. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 92–93.
36. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 169.
37. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 169.
38. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 171.
39. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 92.
40. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 98.
41. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 98.
42. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 249.
43. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 253–54.
44. James Augustus Henry Murray, "Capital," in *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 93.
45. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 99, 232.
46. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 223–24, 232.
47. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 240.
48. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 227.
49. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 237.
50. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 228–30.
51. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 282.



## II

# STIRNER'S INFLUENCE: THREE ENCOUNTERS WITH DIALECTICAL EGOISM



## 4



# The Political Economy of Modernity: Benjamin R. Tucker and the Critique of the Capitalist State

### TUCKER'S ENCOUNTER WITH *THE EGO AND ITS OWN*

Max Stirner is unique among theorists of modernity because of his refusal to theorize about the reconstruction of a social order to follow his devastating critique of modernity. Stirner developed the notions of the unique ego and the union of egoists in very broad brushstrokes. He did not envision fixed patterns of social life, particularly at macrosocietal levels. The alternative he provides is centered on the concept of the unique one and the implications it has for social relationships described in the union of egoists. Stirner's detractors from Marx to Camus to Paterson founded their critiques of dialectical egoism on Stirner's anathema toward social reconstruction. They attacked his resistance to positing alternatives or extracting the societal consequences of his critique of modernity. Stirner is critical of the contradictions of "free competition," and "freedom of the press" under the regime of political liberalism, but does not theorize about a postmodern order.

Stirner's resistance to theorizing about alternative social structures is driven by the strong anti-utopian trajectory in his thought. It would be inconsistent for him to situate the unique one at the core of his philosophy and then proceed to create theoretically the particulars of a new society that unique individuals and unions of egoists have not helped to envision. However, a problematic implication of his dialectical egoism emerges: it is the ambiguous and contradictory formulation of the self-other dialectic in *The Ego and Its Own*. Stirner makes a clear break with other political theories on the question of social order. He makes numerous bold statements



regarding the importance of the exemption of the unique one from the implied social contract of modernist political structures. If the unique one is unconstrained and the absolute owner of “my power,” “my property,” and “my self-enjoyment,” what happens when assertions of ownership of power, property, and self-enjoyment collide? *The Ego and Its Own* is sanguine about the inevitability of conflict. There is no assumption that the interests and behaviors of persons will spontaneously coincide. Stirner says that conflicts over power, property, and self-enjoyment must be settled in the “war of each against all.” Furthermore, he argues that the unique one is unconcerned with others and society; these are not his “affair” and do not matter to the unique one. Do these assertions prefigure a return to, or continuation of, the Hobbesian state of nature? Possibly more damning for a libertarian theorist who proffers the unique individual as the negation of the conformism of modernity, is the clear implication that dialectical egoism likely produces the domination of some individuals by others.

Stirner makes statements that imply the domination of some people by others, but he makes other statements in the discussion of the union of egoists that emphasize *reciprocity* among unique egoists. He makes still other statements indicating that even unique egoists must accept constraints on their liberty required by their interaction with others. Stirner expresses considerable empathy in *The Ego and Its Own* for the condition of human beings in “modern times,” especially workers, children, and victims of governmental abuse. If his dialectical egoism is a legitimation of new forms of domination, or new forms of predation in everyday life, why express any concern for the victims the culture, polity, and economy of modernity? *The Ego and Its Own* is either ambiguous or contradictory on the question of the reciprocity of the self-other relationship. Stirner cannot have it both ways and maintain any consistency on this point. Either his reconstruction of the self-other relationship enables or legitimates interpersonal and societal domination, or it does not, promoting instead a new vision or sense of social relationships, just as it develops a new concept of individuality in the unique one. The issue may be reduced to the question, is dialectical egoism a philosophy that promotes *anarchism*, or is it a philosophy that promotes *archism*? Stirner’s thought either endorses the anarchist notion that individuals cannot legitimately dominate others, or it endorses the archist idea that they can.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectuals and writers who incorporated facets of Stirner’s thought into their own writing typically encountered this ambiguity or contradiction in Stirner’s work. Some concluded that *The Ego and Its Own* is substantively *anarchist*, and others conclude that it is substantively *archist*. Benjamin R. Tucker was one of the intellectuals who was greatly influenced by Stirner’s egoism. Tucker developed a form of individualist anarchism that blended elements of

American individualist thought and European socialism with Stirner's egoism. The Tucker-Stirner relationship has not been fully explored. Eltzbacher included a comparison of Stirner and Tucker in his landmark analysis of seven major anarchist thinkers, arguing that Stirner and Tucker differed on questions pertaining to property, social contracts, and methods to effect social transformation. James J. Martin acknowledges the Stirner-Tucker relationship in his classic *Men Against the State*, and discusses the transition of American individualist anarchism to egoism. However, he does not develop any discussion of how Stirner affected Tucker, or the points of agreement between the two writers. Wendy McElroy includes a chapter in her book on Tucker and *Liberty* that describes the conflicts between the anarchists who argued in favor of natural rights and those who favored egoism. She does not outline Stirner's influence on Tucker nor the points where Tucker departs from Stirner.<sup>1</sup>

Tucker was born in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, in 1854 in a fairly affluent family. His father worked as a supplier to whalers in his early adulthood and later as a wholesaler of spices and groceries. Young Benjamin Tucker was especially well read, devouring the evolutionary theories and scientific methods of Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, and Herbert Spencer, as well as the political economy of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. In his youth, he was greatly influenced by the socially conscious preaching of William J. Potter, the minister of the Unitarian church his family attended. From the age of twelve Tucker was an avid reader of Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. As a teen, he also attended lectures at the New Bedford Lyceum where he listened to abolitionist and libertarian speakers. When he turned seventeen he enrolled in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as an engineering student. During these years, Tucker participated in the New England Labor Reform League where he met Lysander Spooner and other individualist and antistatist activists, including Victoria Woodhull, Josiah Warren, Ezra Heywood, and William B. Greene. He also heard the Abolitionist activists Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison speak passionately about the corruption of the American government and the need for racial justice. He read and absorbed the works of the French protoanarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. The confluence of these strong personalities, combined with an interest in Stirner and egoism, led Tucker to develop an individualist anarchist orientation in his teens. Tucker modified his philosophy throughout his life, but he never renounced it, although he became very pessimistic about the possibilities of a libertarian political order prior to his death in 1939.<sup>2</sup>

Tucker is significant in the history of libertarianism and anarchism for his work as a journalist, translator, and publisher, as well as his writings that developed an individualist anarchist theory of political economy. Tucker is noteworthy for his translations of the writings of Pierre-Joseph

Proudhon. His initial contribution to the libertarian tradition of radical thought was the publication of the *Radical Review* in 1877, which intended to bring an American perspective to the development of anarchist theory on politics and economics. Tucker also worked for the Boston *Daily Globe* and *Engineering Magazine*. He is primarily important for his writings and publication of *Liberty*, the individualist anarchist newspaper he edited from August 1881 to 1907. *Liberty* attracted contributions from many important American and English individualists, including Lysander Spooner, John Beverly Robinson, Steven Byington, Auberon Herbert, and Wordsworth Donisthorpe. Since *Liberty* functioned as a clearinghouse for articles and essays from other individualist and anarchist journals, Tucker also developed publication relationships with Irish, French, Australian, German, and Spanish individualists and anarchists. It is clear from many of Tucker's articles in *Liberty* that he recognized Stirner as an important theorist, particularly in his critiques of the state and the doctrine of natural rights. However, Tucker's knowledge of Stirner's egoism was very limited until Byington translated *The Ego and Its Own* after the turn of the century. Since he was not fluent in German, Tucker was dependent on his colleague George Schumm for an understanding of Stirner and information about the Stirnerite journals published in Germany. Tucker was responsible for the original publication of Byington's English translation of *The Ego and Its Own* in 1903, which Tucker considered to be one of the most significant accomplishments of his career.

I have been engaged for more than 30 years in the propaganda of anarchism, and have achieved some things of which I am proud; but I feel that I have done nothing for the cause that compares in value with my publication of this illuminating document.<sup>3</sup>

Tucker articulated his individualist anarchist philosophy in editorials and responses to letters to the editor of *Liberty*. He assembled many of these into an 1897 volume titled, *Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One*. *Instead of a Book* is actually subtitled *A Fragmentary Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism*. Tucker's individualist anarchism is indeed a "fragmentary exposition" since it is primarily culled together from his writings that appeared in *Liberty*. It does not appear as a systematic statement. Individualist anarchism is a philosophy that was developed not only in response to Tucker's grasp of radical individualist literature, but his interest in shifting events and the interests of his readers. Almost all of Tucker's writings are either brief editorials or comments on contributions from other writers. They lack sustained development of the various aspects of his philosophy.

Another important source of his thought appears in two lengthy essays he published. The first was titled "State Socialism and Anarchism: How Far

They Agree and Wherein They Differ.” This essay differentiates the sources and implications of anarchism and the state socialism of Marx. Tucker wrote “State Socialism and Anarchism” for the *North American Review* shortly after the Haymarket riot in Chicago in 1886. However, the essay never appeared in this publication. Tucker published it in *Liberty* in 1888 and included it in *Instead of a Book* in 1897, presumably because of the intense feelings associated with the violence attributed to anarchism around the turn of the century. The second essay was titled “The Attitude of Anarchism toward Industrial Combinations.” It was originally the text of a speech Tucker gave at the 1899 Conference on Trusts sponsored by the Civic Federation in Chicago. Tucker self-published this essay in 1903.<sup>4</sup>

Individualist anarchist philosophy in this period in American history reveals a profound tension between positions that sought to ground individual liberty and property rights on a philosophy of natural right, following such thinkers as the American abolitionist and individualist Lysander Spooner, and those who rejected natural right as myth and argued for a notion of liberty and property based on Stirner’s concept of “ownness.” This tension was discussed at length through the contributions of many writers in *Liberty*. Tucker and some of his colleagues, such as Byington, argued that they could blend the two interests into an individualist anarchist philosophy, using Stirnerite ideas, that was at once anticapitalist, antistatist, pro-free trade, and prolabor.

Tucker believed that Stirner’s notion of ownness was consistent with a concept he developed called “equal liberty,” which means that no individual or group has the right to seek to dominate or exploit others because each individual has a right to the same degree of individual liberty. Drawing from Stirner’s critique of political economy and social movements in *The Ego and Its Own*, Tucker, Byington, and the other egoists associated with *Liberty* attempted to develop a version of anarchism founded on Stirner’s dialectical egoism that universalized the notion of the unique one. They rejected the *archist* interpretation of *The Ego and Its Own* in favor of the *anarchist* interpretation. Tucker believed that Stirner’s egoism was thoroughly anarchist and should supplant the “natural right” arguments for individual liberty developed by Spooner and other nineteenth-century individualists.<sup>5</sup> This chapter examines the extent to which Tucker adopted and applied Stirner’s dialectical egoism to the analysis of politics, the self-other relationship, economics, and social change.

## BENJAMIN TUCKER AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT

Tucker describes anarchism as “the doctrine that the affairs of men should be managed by individuals or voluntary associations, and the state should

be abolished.” Tucker’s individualist anarchism is a philosophy that couples an egoist rejection of the authority of the state with a concern for the “equal liberty” of the other person. In the writings of the individualist anarchists there is a pronounced focus on the ways in which the state and capital collude to exploit and dominate. The collusion of the state and capital generates class stratification and other forms of exploitation and oppression. Tucker’s most significant contribution to political theory is the articulation of particulars of this collusion in fin de siècle America. Tucker was clearly influenced by Stirner in his analyses of the interaction between the state and capital, and the consequences of this interaction for individual liberty.

In “State Socialism and Anarchism” there are distinct echoes of Stirner as Tucker describes the implications of anarchist thought for the everyday lives on individuals

The individual may decide for himself. . . . No external power must dictate to him what he must and must not eat, drink, wear, or do. Nor does the anarchistic scheme furnish any code of morals to be imposed upon the individual. “Mind your own business” is its only moral law.<sup>6</sup>

However, many of the fundamental concepts and principles Tucker employed during his career were not derived from Stirner. Some reflect notions that Stirner absolutely rejected in *The Ego and Its Own*. From an epistemological standpoint, it is also important to indicate that Tucker was influenced by empiricism and the method and concepts of natural science. Tucker never explored Stirner’s Hegelianism, but he did develop contradictions in his investigations. Like Stirner, Tucker also made reference to historical process and used modernity as a category in his political and economic analyses. Tucker’s individualist anarchist position elaborates three core principles that appear and reappear as threads uniting the entirety of his writings: (a) the labor theory of value is an economic and moral absolute, and it implies that the only legitimate form of property is the use of nature and tools needed to produce material goods, (b) the “equal liberty” of persons is an absolute right, and (c) the preferred form of political practice is “passive resistance.” The three principles reflect the influence of the various intellectuals in Tucker’s life, as well as the tensions among them. They help illuminate the areas and the extent to which Tucker was influenced by Stirner.

### **Labor as the Measure of Value and Right**

Tucker’s use of the labor theory of value was derived from his studies of the economic philosophies of Adam Smith, Josiah Warren, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.<sup>7</sup> Tucker and other American individualists such as

Josiah Warren believed that economic reform was the key to human liberation and, consequently, espoused a type of labor theory of value that they used to define legitimate property and wealth. Adam Smith's classic statement on the labor theory of value was the fundamental economic concept that Tucker and other individualists at the time believed was the practical scaffold for philosophic notions of self-ownership or sovereignty of the individual. Smith said that, "The real price of everything, what everything really costs to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it."<sup>8</sup> The labor theory of value was also applied in political and economic analysis in the United States independently by Josiah Warren and in Europe by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Both Warren and Proudhon believed that labor had a natural right to its product. Warren was a student and colleague of Robert Owen. He participated in Owen's socialist community at New Harmony, Indiana, in the 1820s and became committed to the idea that society could be transformed if successful alternatives based on cooperation could be developed. One of the devices that Owen developed in his experimental communes was the "labor note," which was intended to be a tool for implementing the labor theory of value. Although it was never fully implemented at New Harmony, the theory behind the labor note was that exploitation could be defeated if the compensation for labor could be standardized through a form of currency based on the time individuals spent working. Warren eventually made a break from Owen because of the demands for conformity he observed in the socialist colony. Warren subsequently implemented the labor note as a form of exchange in his Cincinnati Time Store, which operated from 1827 to 1830. Despite the short life and limited objectives of the Cincinnati Time Store, Warren believed that the labor note concept was a viable approach to implementing the labor theory of value. It was the practical expression of a moral precept that should structure economic life: "cost is the limit of price." Warren used this dictum in his subsequent efforts to create utopian communities and it became one of the basic ideas in his statements about a philosophy of individualist anarchism, *Equitable Commerce* and *True Civilization*.<sup>9</sup>

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was the French anarchist who purportedly developed a revolutionary theory of society by blending the labor theory of value with Hegelian dialectics and socialist economics. Proudhon was a contemporary of Stirner and influenced both Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx, although Marx later viciously attacked Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Proudhon's *What Is Property?* and *The System of Economic Contradictions* arguably had the greatest influence on Tucker.<sup>10</sup> Central to Proudhon's mutualist form of anarchism expressed in these two works is the notion that there are two forms of property. The first form refers to ownership over the products of labor; the second refers to ownership over the means

of production. Proudhon argued that the first form of property is legitimate because persons have an absolute right over what they produce, to control their dwellings, and the land and tools they need to work and live. This form of property, which Proudhon called "possession," is the logical expression of the labor theory of value. The second form of property was not legitimate, according to Proudhon, because the means of production represent the heritage of materials and techniques accumulated by many generations and because they require cooperative efforts to function. Capital is illegitimate property because it "constitutes the debt of the capitalist to the producer, which he never pays," and is the cause of the "poverty of the laborer" and the "inequality of conditions." For Proudhon, the private ownership of the means of production is the right of "using and abusing" that legitimates the "irresponsible domain of man over his person and his goods." It is little more than a form of theft. The means of production must be owned collectively and each person must enjoy the product of his labor. The private ownership of the means of production is what Proudhon meant by his famous epigram, "Property is theft."<sup>11</sup>

Following Warren and Proudhon, Tucker claimed that all legitimate forms of property, the pivotal category in his individualist anarchist economics, must be based on the effort or labor of individuals. Therefore, labor, or the persons who produce and create economic value, have an absolute right to own and control the entire economic value that they create. Moreover, exchange must be based on Warren's notion of equitable commerce and Proudhon's idea that the only legitimate form of property is actually the possession of the land and tools that individuals need to support themselves. All other forms of private property inevitably result in exploitation. What differentiates state socialists and communist-oriented anarchists from the individualist anarchists is the belief in the right of persons to own property that they create through their own labor. Tucker identifies the individualist anarchist definition of legitimate property as

that which secures each in the possession of his own products, or of such products of others as he may have obtained unconditionally without the use of fraud or force, and in the realization of all titles to such products which he may hold by virtue of free contracts with others.<sup>12</sup>

Further, the individualist anarchist view of property, "concerns only products. But anything is a product upon which human labor has been expended, whether it is a piece of iron or a piece of land."<sup>13</sup> Tucker credits Adam Smith as the original source of the principle that "labor is the true measure of price." Tucker was critical of Smith and the political economists who followed him for failing to use the concept as the basis for a critique of capitalism. Smith identified the labor theory of value as a moral precept but failed to use it as a standard to evaluate and critique

capitalist society. Tucker believed in free trade and the limited form of private property identified by Proudhon, but he argued that capitalism negates both. The standpoint of the procapitalist political economy of Smith is the description of society as it is, dominated by the financial, industrial, and commercial classes, and not "as it should be, and the discovery of the means of making it what it should be." The goal of individualist anarchism is the deconstruction of the political and the economic processes of capitalism that deprive individuals of the "true" or the "natural" products of their labor.

In his essay "State Socialism and Anarchism," Tucker argued that nine logical deductions could be derived from the work of Warren and Proudhon:

1. The "natural" wage of labor is its product;
2. This wage, or product, is the only "just" source of income or wealth, excluding gifts and inheritance;
3. Those who derive income from any other source "abstract" it directly or indirectly from the "natural and just" wage of labor;
4. The abstraction of income from the "natural and just" wages of labor takes three forms: interest, rent, and profit;
5. These three forms of abstraction constitute the "trinity of usury" and are different methods for levying tribute for the use of capital, or different forms of exploitation;
6. Capital is nothing more than "stored-up labor" which has already received its full compensation and, thus, its use by others ought to be gratuitous;
7. The lender of capital is entitled to only its return and nothing more;
8. The only reason that bankers, capitalists, and landlords are able to exploit labor is because they are supported by legal privilege or monopoly; and
9. The only way for labor to secure its entire product, or natural wage, is to destroy all forms of monopoly.<sup>14</sup>

Profit, rent, and interest are forms of usury; taken together they define capitalism as an economic system. They are forms of surplus value that can only be appropriated from workers by fraud or force, both of which are illegitimate and inequitable forms of commerce. Individualist anarchism seeks to overthrow the private ownership of land and capital, as well as all forms of value or wealth that are derived from the inequitable exchange of labor and capital. Individuals cannot legitimately assert ownership over land or natural resources, except those which they directly occupy and use. The legitimate ownership of property refers solely to the products of human labor. Equitable commerce is founded on the equiva-



lent exchange of labor notes as currency that represent a consistent standard of time that an individual spends working. In the individualist anarchist formulation, unlike that of contemporary libertarians and anarcho-capitalists, property rights are not absolute, but are dependent upon the use of land and products by human beings.

Neither Tucker, Warren, Proudhon, nor Smith deduce the labor theory of value from any form of disciplined observation or axiomatic reasoning. It appears in their writings as a moral precept, popular among the intellectuals who used it in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to critique the emerging social disorganization attendant with industrialization and urbanization. Tucker and Proudhon knew that economies did not function according to the labor theory of value, but they supported a revolutionary movement that would impose it on individuals and society as a fixed idea that could not be challenged or overturned. Warren also knew that it did not describe economic life but sought to impose it as a commandment on artificial communities in the hope that it would spread outside of the social experiments he engineered. Where does the worker's right to own and control the products of his or her labor come from? Why is it "just and natural" for cost to be the limit of price? Why is it "unjust and unnatural" for persons to own productive property and to contract freely with others to exchange their labor for money? Why are property rights for labor just and natural, and those for capitalists are unjust and unnatural?

In many of the arguments with the contributors and readers of *Liberty* where the topic of natural right is discussed, Tucker argues against natural rights from a Stirnerite point of view. He argues that property rights are not "inherent," but a matter of social convention or contract. However, "State Socialism and Anarchism" makes clear that he believes that the labor theory of value expresses in theoretical form the idea that the "just and natural" wage of labor is the right of the worker to own and control the products of his labor. If rights are a matter of social convention, contract, or construction, they cannot be "natural" or fixed in nature in any form. Instead, they are dependent upon the varying perceptions and agreements that persons construct in their interaction. Whether property rights are equitable or inequitable also depends upon social convention, contract, or agreement. Tucker, of course, is one voice arguing that some property rights are just and others are unjust, but other voices propound alternatives. Tucker's argument is not intuitively superior. The characterization of the labor theory of value as the expression of the "just and natural" wages of labor posits it as part of the fixed environment in which humans must function. Despite his protests, Tucker's "just and natural" argument for the labor theory of value is ultimately an assertion of right fixed in nature. This is a clear difference from Stirner, who rejected any sort of external concept of right, whether it is grounded in religion, humanism, or nature.

Tucker's individualist anarchism entails some important contradictions on the matter of property rights that are derived from the labor theory of value. Tucker frequently dismissed notions of natural right and was even willing to correct his own arguments on this matter when his readers pointed out the contradictions in his thought. He was also a political economist who wanted to recreate a theory of social and political order to advance his vision of an alternative society. Tucker was attracted to Stirner because of the latter's critique of fixed moral codes that Tucker believed were outmoded and antithetical to individual freedom. But it is impossible to discern in Tucker's writings an argument that Stirner's egoism is a viable philosophy to reconstruct society. Tucker was very much influenced in his effort by a libertarian tradition in the United States and Europe that was philosophically dependent upon natural right as the basis for its critique of capitalism and vision of a libertarian society. While Tucker could shake off "natural right" when questions about morality and interpersonal relations appeared in the pages of *Liberty*, he could not shake it off on issues pertaining to political economy. He did not reconcile Stirner's egoism with the natural right philosophy of Smith, Warren, and Proudhon.

### **Equal Liberty**

The second principle in Tucker's thought was a concept of self-ownership or sovereignty of the individual which Tucker refers to as "the law of equal liberty" or "the principle of equal liberty." "State Socialism and Anarchism" is an important essay because it is the only organized statement by Tucker that summarizes the basic philosophical principles that underlie his writings. The initial philosophic opposition that Tucker develops in the essay is between "authority" and "liberty." Tucker identifies the two as divergent principles that can be used to organize human activities. Tucker argues that anarchism and state socialism are both forms of socialist thought that emerged out of Adam Smith's notion that "labor is the true measure of price." Tucker says that the labor theory of value is a significant advance in social theory because it grounded economic value and all notions of social justice in the practical, everyday activities of humans. Anarchism and state socialism took radically different paths in their efforts to use this idea as a lever to change society. The state socialists, who by the 1880s were primarily Marxists, argued that labor could only receive the full value of its product in the framework of a social system in which all productive property is owned and controlled by the state. In turn, the state must be dominated by a socialist elite that will determine economic value through an authoritarian political process. The anarchists, on the other hand, sought the progressive dismantling of the state. Among other things, persons should be

allowed to determine the value of labor autonomously, or outside the structure of a government.

The problem with authority is that it is universally “invasive” of the “self-jurisdiction of the individual within a voluntary society.” Tucker’s primary intent was to help establish society as a voluntary association, or a society by contract, in which individuals could act freely without intrusion by the state.<sup>15</sup> Tucker’s concept of liberty is largely negative in that he defines it as the opposition to, or antithesis of, authority or invasion. Tucker’s liberty is very similar to the idea of negative freedom, or the absence of constraint. Anarchism upholds “the right of every individual to be or select his own priest, they likewise uphold his right to be or select his own doctor. No monopoly in theology, no monopoly in medicine. Competition everywhere and always.” Further, “no external power must dictate to him what he must and must not eat, drink, wear, or do.”<sup>16</sup> Tucker supports free trade and argues for the elimination of all monopolies, which is essential to eliminating all forms of exploitation that occur in everyday life. It only when persons are secure from both force and fraud that they are free. Tucker uses the term “liberty” to imply that individuals have access to the tools and materials that enable them to produce or earn a living. “State Socialism and Anarchism” closes with Tucker quoting Ernest Lesigne’s statement that contrasts state socialism and anarchism:

One says:  
 The land to the State.  
 The mine to the State.  
 The tool to the State.  
 The product to the State.  
 The other says:  
 The land to the cultivator.  
 The mine to the miner.  
 The tool to the laborer.  
 The product to the producer.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of liberty means that the individual enters into contracts voluntarily, is a member of only those associations she or he has joined voluntarily, lives in a noninvasive environment free of monopolies, and has access to nature and the technology to produce.

Tucker intends to promote a Stirnerite point of view on questions pertaining to rights. He says that anarchists “totally discard the idea of moral obligation, of inherent rights and duties” and that “so far as inherent right is concerned, might is its only measure.”<sup>18</sup> In order to articulate the principle of equal liberty, he must modify Stirner’s egoism. Although Tucker was influenced by many concepts of self-ownership in the libertarian tradition, he was particularly attracted to William Lloyd Garrison’s aboli-

tionist philosophy that every person, regardless of race or any other characteristic, has an inalienable right to control his or her own body, behavior, as well the outcomes of his or her labor. Tucker defined equal liberty as “the largest amount of liberty compatible with equality and mutuality of respect, on the part of individual’s living in society, for their respective spheres of action.”<sup>19</sup> The notion of equal liberty implies that each person is equally free to pursue his or her self-interest, and is bound only by “a mutuality of respect.” Tucker says that equal liberty is not a natural right, but a social convention or a contract.

Now equal liberty itself being a social convention (for there are no natural rights), it is obvious that anarchism recognizes the propriety of compelling individuals to regard *one* social convention. But it does not follow from this that it recognizes the propriety of compelling individuals to regard any and all social convention. Anarchism protects equal liberty (of which property based on labor is simply an expression in a particular sphere), not because it is a social convention, but because it is equal liberty, that is, because it is anarchism itself.<sup>20</sup>

As a social construct, equal liberty should be protected through “voluntary association” and not through government because government is the negation of equal liberty. The notion of equal liberty is an absolute or first principle for Tucker since it appears as a core concept in all of his writings. He makes it abundantly clear that equal liberty is inextricably tied to his notions of both anarchism and self-ownership. Tucker equates equal liberty with anarchism.

Although Tucker claims that equal liberty is not a natural right, but a social construction, he infuses the notion with the rhetoric of rights, including the concepts of duty and compulsion. People have “a duty to respect other’s rights, assuming the word ‘right’ to be used in the sense of the limit which the principle of equal liberty logically places upon might.” Further, “man’s only duty is to respect others’ ‘rights’ . . . man’s only right over others is to enforce that duty.” Tucker bases his notion of the law of equal liberty on “the distinction between invasion and resistance, between government and defense.” He uses the term “invasion” to refer to the “line inside of which liberty of action does not conflict with others’ liberty of action.” Persons have the right to resist invasion and to defend or protect their personal liberty. As Eltzbacher phrases it, “The individual has the right to repel invasion of his sphere of action.” Tucker proposes that the law of equal liberty be given some teeth through the creation of “defensive associations” that would act coercively on behalf of the anarchistic principle of equal liberty, prohibiting and demanding redress for invasive acts. As far as Tucker is concerned, defensive associations have the same purpose to resist invasion whether

the people are resisting an oppressive law, rising against a despot, or restraining a criminal.<sup>21</sup>

Equal liberty implies a universal moral or political claim that individuals have a right to as much liberty as that which does not contradict the liberty of others. Equal liberty is a concept that always implies an "other." The other's liberty provides the boundary of the individual's freedom and helps define the meaning of self-ownership or the sovereignty of the individual. Equal liberty, therefore, is a universal or generalizable form of self-ownership that certainly goes beyond Stirner's focus on "my power," "my property," and "my self-enjoyment." Equal liberty has an objective and collective form since no individual can be excluded from it, or exempt self from it. Equal liberty assumes that there is some external, knowable standard to assess the "equality" of liberty, or the behavioral boundaries between and among persons. There must be some standard that can operationalize the meaning of invasion and defense. Otherwise, how do persons know what constitutes liberty, invasion, and defense? Without an objective standard equal liberty is merely a restatement of the war of each against all. Otherwise, competing defensive associations are likely to challenge each other's actions to enforce equal liberty. How do persons know when people have equal liberty? Tucker's concept also implies that there is some sort of social agent who can legitimately mediate and enforce what constitutes equal liberty, or what constitutes appropriate boundaries demarcating what people can and cannot do.

Tucker argues that equal liberty and anarchism logically entail each other. It is apparent in his discussion that equal liberty is a tool to recreate the self-other relationship outside the domain of the capitalist state. Stirner's fluid and transient "union of egoists" is apparently not sufficient to protect equal liberty as a moral absolute. The significant question for Tucker is, does the idea of a "defensive association" simply recreate the state in a new form? Does Tucker's argument for equal liberty differ from the natural rights arguments by John Locke, Ayn Rand, and Robert Nozick that base the legitimation of the state on the need to protect and defend the liberty of individuals? It is difficult to differentiate Tucker's anarchism from the arguments of other philosophers who argue for a minimalist state to protect the rights and liberty of individuals.

Perhaps more significant from the standpoint of Tucker's methodology is how he discovered that equal liberty is either a first principle or a moral absolute. Where did it come from? Why is it a first principle? In the writings of other individualist anarchists, such as Josiah Warren, Stephen Pearl Andrews, William Lloyd Garrison, and Lysander Spooner, first principles or moral absolutes were derived from a philosophy of natural rights. The rights of persons and their duties to others were thought to emanate from God, or were inherent in the nature of human beings. Later

individualists and libertarians such as Rand, Nozick, Ludwig von Mises, and Murray Rothbard derived their concepts of individual rights from axiomatic forms of reasoning, again arguing that rights are inherent in nature or in the nature of human beings.<sup>22</sup> For Tucker, rights implied by equal liberty simply appear as a matter of social convention, even though there is no evidence that any society ever agreed to them. Tucker uses equal liberty as a vehicle to critique the state and capitalism, but he intended the concept to be used as basis for the reconstruction of society on the heels of an anarchist social transformation. Strangely, equal liberty is a right based in social convention, but it is the only social convention that has any authority, according to Tucker.

Tucker's approach is a marked contrast to the approach of Stirner, who argued that natural rights derived from God or nature were "spooks," and the rights derived from social convention were merely the imposition of the will of stronger, richer, better organized elements in society. For Stirner, rights have little to do with how people live their lives and are always dependent upon the ability of persons to impose them on others. Tucker intends to meld Stirner with the natural right tradition in American individualist anarchist thought. Tucker cannot successfully reconcile Stirner's egoism with the legacy of the natural right philosophy he inherited from Warren, Andrews, and Spooner. Despite the many merits of the attempt to infuse individualist anarchism with Stirner's dialectical egoism, Tucker's political and economic thought is solidly based on a philosophy of right. The frequent references in his writings to the rights of individuals and groups casts considerable doubt on the claim that Tucker successfully integrated Stirner's egoism with the natural right legacy of American individualist anarchism.

## THE EMERGENCE OF MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

In Tucker's individualist anarchism, profit, rent, and interest are the concrete means by which one social class dominates another. Each is a form of exploitation since it is economic value that capitalists, landowners, and bankers appropriate but do not earn. Viewed from the standpoint of workers, tenants, and borrowers, profit, rent, and interest are forms of usury in which economic value is forcibly expropriated from the individual. The extraction of surplus value in the forms of profit, rent, and interest certainly generates opposition to capitalism by workers, tenants, and borrowers, but capitalism persists because political and economic elites collude to create monopolies that are legitimated and protected by the state.

There is a profound similarity in the analysis and critique of capitalism by the state socialists led by Marx and the anarchists led by Proudhon and

Warren. Tucker traces the similarity to the mutual recognition that labor does not receive the full value of what it produces. The two movements differ dramatically in how they would reconstruct society. Marxists envision a social revolution in which the proletariat, through its agent, the communists, seize political power and begin the process of "expropriating the expropriators," socializing the means and outcomes of production. The mutualists or individualist anarchists like Tucker, Proudhon, and Warren, also envision a social transformation, but one that would destroy, not seize, state power and, thereby, destroy the monopolies that produce class inequalities. Theoretically, the outcome of the individualist anarchist destruction of the state would be a society based on voluntarism and cooperation in which no one would have any special privileges, but all would compete and cooperate as they pursue their individual interests. All forms of possession and economic value would be based on use, not titles or privileges conferred by the state.

Unlike the Marxists and other state socialists, the individualist anarchists do not believe that the appropriate response to the exploitation caused by monopoly and authority was the centralization of monopoly and authority in the state. Instead, Tucker and his colleagues believed that competition, the "antithesis of monopoly," was the means to make liberty, not authority, universal. The individualist anarchists "saw in competition the great leveler of prices to the labor cost of production." But all prices do not fall to the cost of labor because there is only a one-sidedness to competition under capitalism. Historically, the capitalist class successfully manipulated legislation to provide an unlimited supply of productive labor, "keeping wages down to the starvation point, or as near it as practicable." For the capitalists, "almost no competition at all is allowed in supplying capital," "keeping the rate of interest on money and of house-rent and ground-rent as high as the necessities of the people will bear."<sup>23</sup> The individualist anarchist solution was to extend the competitive, laissez-faire principle to all aspects of economy and society. In a practical sense, the promotion of absolute free trade meant that four forms of collusion between the state and capital need to be destroyed: the banking monopoly, the land monopoly, the tariff monopoly, and the intellectual property monopoly.

At the base of the individualist anarchist economic philosophy is the search for practices that promote the sovereignty of the individual. Following Warren, Tucker argued that the tendency toward monopoly or building trusts was a major flaw of capitalism because it signified that individuals were deprived of the right to compete and access to the tools needed to participate in competition. In his speech to the Civic Federation on "industrial combinations," Tucker lists the basic elements of his critique of capitalism.

1. The right to cooperate is as inviolable as the right to compete;
2. The right to compete involves the right to refrain from competition;
3. Cooperation is often a method of competition;
4. Competition is always a method of cooperation;
5. Each is a legitimate, orderly, noninvasive exercise of the individual will under the law of equal liberty; and
6. Any man or institution attempting to prohibit or restrict either, in any way, is an enemy of liberty.<sup>24</sup>

Tucker argues that the banking or money monopoly was the most significant form of monopoly in terms of the damage to free competition and the exploitation of labor, and, thus, one of the most dangerous enemies of individual liberty. The banking monopoly refers to the “privilege given by the government to certain individuals, or to individuals holding certain kinds of property, of issuing the circulating medium.” Tucker claims that the individuals who hold this privilege “control the rate of interest, the rate of the rent of houses and buildings, and the prices of goods,—the first directly, and the second and third indirectly.”<sup>25</sup> Tucker’s argument appears somewhat archaic in the United States today largely because of the role of the Federal Reserve and the complexity of both financial and labor markets. A contemporary restatement of Tucker’s position argues that the banking monopoly is a form of privilege controlled by the government in which “the licensing of banks, capitalization requirements, and other market entry barriers enable banks to charge a monopoly price for loans in the form of usurious interest rates.”<sup>26</sup> For Tucker, the extraction of surplus value in the form of interest occurs because of the “money monopoly,” which deprives all individuals and associations of the right to issue promissory notes as currency,

thereby compelling all holders of property other than the kind thus privileged, as well as nonproprietors, to pay tribute to the holders of the privileged property for the use of a circulating medium and instrument of credit which, in the complex stage that industry and commerce have now reached, has become the chief essential of a competitive market.<sup>27</sup>

The individualist anarchist critique of finance capital was historically based on a strand of radical thought in the nineteenth century that emphasized the control of access to capital in the production of class inequality and the role of “mutual” banks as alternative forms of finance. Warren’s Cincinnati Time Store was conceived as a type of mutual bank that extended credit to individuals and associations based on the exchange of labor notes, a type of currency that was created in opposition to the “official” currency established by the United States government. Lysander Spooner also challenged the legitimacy of the money monopoly through a series of



pamphlets and articles he published from 1843 to 1873 that attacked the presumption that the power to print money does not entail the right to enforce its universal acceptance and use, nor does it preclude alternative forms of currency.<sup>28</sup> In 1843, Spooner published *Constitutional Law Relative to Credit*, a pamphlet that argues that the right of banking and issuance of promissory notes is as much a natural right as any other effort to earn a living. The effort by the government to suppress competition in banking and credit is as foolish as the idea that government should prohibit competition in agriculture and manufacturing.<sup>29</sup> In his 1861 pamphlet, *A New System of Paper Currency*, Spooner writes that neither the federal government nor state governments have any authority under the *Constitution of the United States* to prohibit, limit, or regulate private banking in any form. Consequently, individuals have a natural right to issue, sell, exchange, and loan private currency based on land or capital. The United States government has no right to forbid private commerce or exchange in currency, credit, or banking. In his view, federal law that prohibits, limits, or regulates private commerce in these areas has the effect of conferring special privileges for both making contracts and for avoiding the responsibility of them.<sup>30</sup> Spooner's analysis of the illegitimate role of government in currency, credit, and banking influenced Tucker's analysis greatly because it illuminated the ability of the government to generate and protect class inequality through the extraction of surplus value in the form of interest.

Both Warren and Spooner provided an important theoretical foundation for Tucker's critique of the banking monopoly, but he was enormously influenced by the banking reformer William B. Greene on monetary theory. Greene was a graduate of West Point and Harvard Divinity School. He served in the campaign against the Seminole Indians in Florida during 1817–1818. Unlike Warren, Spooner, and Tucker, Greene was not a lifelong theorist and activist for individualist anarchism. He only adopted anarchist ideas during the last decade of his life. He was astonished at the economic collapse that occurred during the Great Panic of 1837, which has been called America's first great depression. The Great Panic of 1837 was initiated by the collapse of the real estate market and the failures of banks across the country. Estimates are that as many as 90 percent of the factories in the United States went out of business, and hundreds of farms failed for the lack of credit. The country experienced record unemployment and depression for five years. Upon observing the economic devastation, Greene devoted himself to the analysis of money and banking. He articulated his theories in a series of articles that appeared in several 1849 issues of the *Palladium*, a newspaper published in Worcester, Massachusetts. Greene's articles were originally published in book form under the title *Equality* in 1849, and appeared again later that same year in a revised form as *Mutual Banking*.<sup>31</sup>

Greene argues in *Mutual Banking* that monopolistic forms of banking were actually exploitative of workers, artisans, farmers, and other borrowers because governmental control of currency and credit prevented free competition in offering credit. Hence, average people had little or no leverage to negotiate with or to force concessions from lenders. The banking monopoly helped create class divisions in American society by differentiating those who made profit without producing anything and those whose produce was expropriated in the form of interest. Furthermore, the banking monopoly was able to artificially inflate the price of gold and silver because their legal designation as the basis of value for paper currency (at the time) increased their scarcity. This had the concomitant effect of artificially deflating the value of other commodities. The banking monopoly devalues the income and wealth of workers, artisans, and farmers by issuing, circulating, and storing more paper money than banks can ever redeem; thus, undermining the basis of value of a currency and the labor it represents. Greene's most important criticism is that the banking monopoly creates depressions and economic crises; it does not solve them. By issuing more money than can be redeemed, the banking monopoly helps drive prices upward. Capitalists sell their products as prices increase, reaping artificially high profits. Banks then make money scarce by drawing in loans which forces individuals to sell property to raise money. Workers, tenants, and farmers sell at losses, prices decline, and capitalists are able to buy while prices are depressed.<sup>32</sup>

In response, Greene proposed a form of mutual banking in which land, not gold or silver, would serve as the basis for currency. Individuals became members of a mutual bank by offering a mortgage on the real estate they owned and, in return, were offered "bills of exchange" against the mortgage. Members of the bank agreed to accept the bills of exchange at the contracted value when presented by other members. The interest rate charged by the bank was theoretically only enough to pay the expenses of the bank. Greene argued that the silver dollar would be the standard of value for the bills offered by the mutual bank because of its stability, universality, and clarity as a means of exchange. More than anything else, Greene argued that the mutual bank would be a financing solution for workers, artisans, and farmers, the class of Americans who were marginalized and exploited by the form of monopoly banking taking shape in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century.

Mutual banking will make money exceedingly plenty, it will cause a rise in the rate of wages, thus benefiting the man who has no property but his bodily strength; and it will not cause a proportionate increase in the price of the necessities of life: for the price of provisions, etc., depends on supply and demand; and mutual banking operates, not directly on supply and demand, but to the diminution of the rate of interest on the medium of exchange.<sup>33</sup>

Tucker believed that the core of the problem with monopoly banking was the interest, or unearned wealth, that banks were allowed to appropriate from borrowers. Moreover, despite its deleterious consequences for individual liberty and free competition, interest had become an essential feature of monopoly capitalism. Interest is made possible by the “denial of liberty” or exercise of state power in banking which deprives individuals and associations of the right to issue promissory notes as currency and forces all but bankers to “pay tribute to the holders of this privileged property.”<sup>34</sup>

In many respects, Tucker keyed off of the analyses by Warren, Spooner, and Greene, integrating the critical features of their analyses. He also offered some new elements to the individualist anarchist critique of finance capital. Tucker understood the importance of an economy based on money. He argued that money is essential to prosperity and economic development since its universality facilitates the division of labor, ensuring that society can rise above mere barter. Under monopoly forms of capitalism, the right to lend money is monopolized by government-authorized banks that use the law to limit competition and exclude alternative, mutual, or free banking. The problem, then, is that governments monopolize the right to determine legitimate forms of exchange, who can exchange, and the rates of exchange. Although money has no inherent value except for its symbolic representation of capital, it acquires material value because the state compels its use and, thus, forces people to accept it as the measure of the real value of labor and wealth. Borrowers are placed at a disadvantageous competitive position against banks because they are required to purchase capital from property holders who are allowed to charge interest to cover the risk and expense associated with the loan. The interest charged to borrowers is a form of usury because it signifies that the lender forcibly extracts surplus value from the borrower; thus creating class inequalities. The banking or money monopoly produces and reproduces class inequalities because it defines the medium of exchange, limits who can participate in exchanges, and supports the exploitation inherent in interest, especially through the maintenance of artificially high interest rates.

Tucker was not interested in pursuing the experimental alternatives proposed by Warren, Spooner, and Greene. Instead, his goal was a social transformation guided by individualist anarchist principles that would destroy the banking monopoly to allow voluntary and mutual forms of exchange and banking, among other things. According to Tucker, the anarchist overthrow of the state and destruction of monopoly banking would enable “thousands of people” to go into business who were previously deterred because of artificially high interest rates. Presumably, banks would be able charge for the cost of doing business, but they could

not charge for the use of capital. The positive consequences would be that (a) interest rates will fall because banks could take personal property and other forms of promissory payments as collateral, (b) wages would go up because there will be more competition for labor, (c) labor will receive its natural wage, and (d) profits would go down because merchants, artisans, and farmers would be able to borrow at "less than one percent."<sup>35</sup>

Although Tucker believed that the banking monopoly was the most important form of governmental collusion with corporations to exploit individuals, he recognized the land monopoly as another very significant tool of class domination. Tucker based his critique of rent and the land monopoly on the work of Massachusetts land reformer Joshua K. Ingalls. Ingalls participated in a variety of oppositional movements during his lifetime, including abolitionism, currency and labor reform. He became a philosophical anarchist sometime around 1849 after first learning about the ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and subsequently meeting Josiah Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews. Unlike Warren and the utopian socialists, Ingalls became very committed to the idea that the lion's share of poverty and social disorganization was based on the unlimited accumulation of land attendant with both feudalism and the mechanization of agriculture in capitalist society. As an anarchist, he rejected the philosophy of the single-tax movement that promoted Henry George's argument that wealth should be redistributed through the heavy taxation of large land owners. In Ingalls's view, the key to solving many social problems was the redistribution of land, even arguing that the most propitious approach to eliminating slavery was to reform the distribution of land.<sup>36</sup>

Ingalls was well known among radicals in the second half of the nineteenth century because of his history of advocacy for land reform. He wrote several books promoting land reform as the linchpin to social justice and submitted several articles for publication in *Liberty*. Tucker was attracted to Ingalls's philosophy for two reasons: First, Ingalls strongly objected to governmental action to obtain social justice. Second, he established two criteria for the legitimate possession of land: occupancy and use. Tucker believed that Ingalls's emphasis on occupancy and use were entirely compatible with the notion of the labor theory of value and its corollary that cost is the limit of price. Ingalls established in his book *Social Wealth* and in the articles published in *Liberty* that "one's own person" is the natural limit to property in human beings. Hence, for both Tucker and Ingalls, legitimate possession or tenure in land is founded entirely on what individuals can reasonably cultivate or use for economic purposes. The ownership or title to land beyond the natural limit is irrational and a denial of liberty since it prohibits other individuals from using land to produce the material goods necessary to survival and prosperity. Rent is a form of surplus value since it compels "the non-owning users to pay tribute to the non-using owners as

a condition of admission to the competitive market."<sup>37</sup> By issuing titles to land, and by using coercion or the threat of coercion to enforce them, the state colludes with large landowners in the exploitation of the mass of propertyless persons. The collusion between the state and landowners is a form of monopoly that parallels the banking monopoly. Rent is a form of exploitation that parallels interest because of the extraction of surplus value from a dispossessed population.

Tucker also critiqued tariffs and intellectual property along similar lines. He argued that the tariff monopoly consisted in nothing more than enabling "production at high prices and under unfavorable conditions by visiting with the penalty of taxation those who patronize production at low prices and under favorable conditions."<sup>38</sup> The emergent monopoly in intellectual property protected "inventors and authors against competition for a period long enough to enable them to extort from the people a reward enormously in excess of the labor measure of their services."<sup>39</sup> In each case, the labor theory of value and its corollary, "cost is the limit of price," served as the philosophic foundation of Tucker's analysis and critique. His argument is that governmental intrusion into economic activities consistently yields protections and entitlements to specific classes of people, enabling the extraction of surplus value. Tucker believed that individualist anarchism included the only economic program "which consists in the destruction of these monopolies and the substitution for them of the freest competition." The goal is to realize the fundamental principle of individualist anarchism: "the freedom of the individual, his right of sovereignty over himself, his products, and his affairs, and of rebellion against the dictation of external authority."<sup>40</sup>

Tucker's synthesis of the individualist anarchist critiques of finance capitalism has a number of strengths, at least for its historical period. Among these is that it provided a libertarian and individualist alternative to Marxian analysis, focusing on the principle of labor receiving the full value of its product, and promoting prosperity through cooperation and competition, rather than governmental coercion. Tucker's analysis failed to convince all of his loyal readers in *Liberty*. To be sure, some readers, such as Hugo Bilgram, responded by arguing for continued governmental control of money, land, pricing, and patents and copyright.

The Stirnerite egoists who read *Liberty*, such as John Badcock, raised important questions about Tucker's position. For example, in a series of exchanges with Tucker, Badcock argued against the notion that "cost is the limit of price" in banking or in any sort of exchange because owners of any form of capital can legitimately request and receive payment for the use of their capital. Similarly, buyers in any sort of transaction can legitimately offer and submit payment for a service or a product. For Badcock, it was up to the buyers and sellers what constitutes appropriate

payment in any type of transaction. Moreover, Badcock wondered how the “cost is the limit of price” principle could be measured or enforced in a society based on voluntary association.<sup>41</sup>

What annoyed Badcock was the imposition of an abstract concept, like the labor theory of value, or a slogan, like “cost is the limit of price,” on the exchanges among individuals. Badcock believed that Tucker’s economics was a clear refutation of egoism because it was based on the ideal types externalized, universal concepts promulgated by Feuerbach. It was a form of humanism. It was a form of modernism. Tucker rejected Badcock’s arguments and held out the threat that force from defensive associations could be used to deter and contain “usury” in an anarchistic society. For the Stirnerites like Badcock, it was important to oppose the usury of the phony “free competition” of political liberalism, but to also evade the subordination of interpersonal interaction to fixed moral precepts like “cost is the limit of price.”

As far as Badcock was concerned, Tucker’s egoism was suspect because it insisted on subordinating definitions of the equity of exchanges among individuals. This was precisely the type of externalized theoretical concept that Stirner himself ridiculed in the humanism of Feuerbach and the socialism of Proudhon. Stirner developed his notion that the state rests on the “slavery of labor” independently of Warren, Spooner, and Greene. He, thus, had an independent influence on the debates that appeared in *Liberty*. But unlike the American individualist anarchists, Stirner rejected the socialist and humanist notion that labor is the sole source of value. In his arguments against Proudhon and the socialists, Stirner argues against the idea that economic value somehow exists external to the interactions and exchanges that occur among people in everyday life. He states that there is no universal and absolute measure of economic value that only technical specialists can know. Value is the outcome of individual choices and interactions, not a fixity that can be imposed on exchange.

Tucker’s political economics was founded on the notion that property was antithetical to individual freedom. Sounding more like Marx than Stirner, Tucker says,

It has come about that we have made of property a fetish; that we consider it a sacred thing; that we have set up the god of property on an altar as an object of idol-worshipping; and that most of us are not only doing what we can to strengthen and perpetuate his reign within the proper and original limits of his sovereignty, but also are mistakenly endeavoring to extend his dominion.<sup>42</sup>

Contrary to Tucker’s argument, Stirner’s unique ones respect the “competence and power” of those they exchange with. They do not respect the imposition of abstract ethical or political formulations on their interactions or relationships. For Stirner, like Tucker, free competition was es-

sential to individual freedom, but it could not be subordinated to external formulae. "Competition makes everything purchasable. . . . [C]ompetition leaves it to their (egoists) appraisal or their estimation, and demands a price for it."<sup>43</sup>

For Stirner, measures of economic value cannot be externally imposed upon the exchanges of unique individuals. The imposition of external measures of value is a characteristic of social liberalism in modernity; it is not a characteristic of dialectical egoism. Tucker's political economic critique of monopoly capitalism bears only a surface similarity with Stirner's critique of the politics and economics of modernity. Individualist anarchism is fundamentally a blend of what Stirner called "social liberalism" and "humane liberalism." The similarity between Tucker and Stirner on political economy is broad, but superficial. Tucker's individualist anarchism is a philosophy and strategy for the redistribution of wealth based upon a universal, absolute, human-centered theory of value, modernist notions that Stirner rejects in *The Ego and Its Own*.<sup>44</sup> Tucker's use of concepts such as equal liberty and surplus value signify dramatic departures from Stirner's egoism. They purport to describe and structure human experience from an external, universal perspective.

While both Tucker and Stirner repudiate the idea that only the state confers legitimate ownership, there are profound differences between the two. Stirner's philosophy celebrates the individual's assertion of ownership and property. His rhetoric of ownness, ownership, and property establish the individual's uniqueness and autonomy, and undermine the power of the state, the collectivity, and ideology over the person. In Stirner's thought, property is the enemy of modernity. Tucker recognized that the nature of capitalism was changing from a laissez-faire to a monopoly form. The forces of production were changing from predominantly agricultural to a predominantly manufacturing form, a process Tucker laments through his focus on rent and land reform. The nature of the relationship between capital and the state was changing as well. In Tucker's thought, "property" was a code word for the centralist, monopolistic, and exploitative character of modernity. Tucker's philosophy attacks ownership and property, celebrating human use and universal access to the means of production guided by collectivist moral and political precepts that were to be imposed by force, if conformity was not forthcoming. Tucker's individualist anarchism is a synthesis of Proudhon's socialism and the natural law philosophy of early American individualism, particularly that expressed in the writings of Warren, Spooner, Greene, and Ingalls. Whatever value Proudhon's socialism and natural law philosophy contribute to the critique of monopoly capitalism, they differ from Stirner's dialectical egoism, which unambiguously rejects socialism, humanism, and notions that rights are founded in nature.

## POLITICAL STRATEGY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Tucker was absolutely convinced that his version of anarchism would destroy the major forms of monopoly that exploit individuals and promote class inequality. He was certain that it would eradicate all forms of social disorganization. With all of the immodest rhetorical flourish of an American politician on the night before an election, he promises “liberty is the remedy of every social evil, and to anarchy the world must look at last for any enduring guarantee of social order.”<sup>45</sup> Specifically, “liberty will abolish interest; it will abolish profit; it will abolish monopolistic rent; it will abolish taxation; it will abolish the exploitation of labor; it will abolish all means whereby any labor can be deprived of any of his product.”<sup>46</sup> What are the legitimate and effective means by which individualist anarchists will “remedy every social evil” and how do they compare with Stirner’s arguments about revolution and insurrection?

Tucker gave considerable thought to organization and political strategy. He worked to articulate a distinctly individualist anarchist approach to social change, differentiating it from the methods and political practice of reformist and revolutionary theories that either emphasized the importance of government or collective action to achieve political goals. He was particularly critical of the political practice of state socialism, communism, and anarchist communism because of the proclivities of these tendencies toward authoritarian forms of organization and collective violence. He was also typically critical of the expressions of violence and terrorism perpetrated by “lone wolf” anarchists in Europe around the turn of the century. Although generally critical of political violence against capital and the state, Tucker articulated some circumstances in which violence is an appropriate form of political action. He was careful to interpret examples of political violence from a variety of perspectives that included that of the perpetrator(s), the victim(s), and the broader implications for the political process. Tucker discussed an array of alternative political strategies available to anarchists and others who want to create a new society out of authoritarian and exploitative social environments. Of the five alternatives he identified, four were discarded as largely unworkable or antithetical to his version of anarchism.

### **Political Action**

Much of Tucker’s discussion about political methods occurred in response to readers of *Liberty* who sought perspective on how to resist the exploitation of labor without joining socialist and communist organizations. Other discussions concerned Tucker’s attitudes toward Henry George and the single tax movement, which many of his readers believed was a viable form



of resistance to monopoly capitalism. Still others promoted the basic argument of socialism that the state should be used as the vehicle to defeat the exploitation of labor through the nationalization of the means of production and the collectivizing of products. Tucker unequivocally rejected the arguments by the Georgists and the socialists that all supporters of labor should seek emancipation through the ballot, or work to elect parties and candidates that were supportive of labor. There were even some anarchists who believed that the road to freedom inevitably included participation in the electoral processes available in democratic nations to defeat monopoly capital. In their view, the power of the democratic state was needed to defeat the centralizing tendencies of modernity. For Tucker, the "belief in the ballot" is an unprincipled "expediency" that undermined conviction and pared away at the philosophic stance of anarchism, eventually depriving the conduct of anarchists of their "nobleness and character of elevation."

Tucker argued in the pages of *Liberty* throughout his career that the "belief in the ballot" was inimical to the fundamental ideas of anarchism, particularly the idea that force is almost never justified in human relationships and that its use is futile in almost all circumstances. Tucker reasoned that the ballot is "neither more nor less than a paper representative of the bayonet, the billy, and the bullet." Democratic processes "save bloodshed" by giving people a voice in "ascertaining on which side force lies and bowing to the inevitable," but it is no less the application of force in social life "than is the decree of the most absolute of despots backed by the most powerful of armies." The political process of building a consensus among a majority involves "an incidental use of intellectual and moral processes," but these could be more powerfully employed in the "direct democracy" advocated by the anarchists. Moreover, the use of reason and moral persuasion in electoral processes,

represent only a striving for the time when physical force can be substituted for them. Reason devoted to politics fights for its own dethronement. The moment the minority becomes the majority, it ceases to reason and persuade, and begins to command and enforce and punish.<sup>47</sup>

The use of the ballot for the modification of government is equivalent to using force to modify the government. It is based on an unjustifiable premise and a "social crime to avoid." Contrary to those who seek to change society through democratic governance, anarchism focuses on "purely educational methods" of reaching liberty and, thus, abhors political action in all of its forms. The problem with seeking change through any type of political expediency is that it contradicts the prime directive of anarchism: force is not an appropriate means of achieving societal goals whether it is employed directly through physical coercion or indirectly through the electoral process. Moreover, Tucker argued that the

goal of anarchism is the elimination of the state as a social institution, which means all governments, present and future, not just particular governments or existing governments. The abolition of the state as a social institution goes far beyond the reformation or modification of any particular state.<sup>48</sup> It is contradictory to pursue the elimination of the state as a social institution through the participation in electoral processes. Political action only helps strengthen the state and inhibits the full realization of anarchist goals. It is preferable for anarchists to maintain consistency even if it opens them to criticisms of impracticality and forces them to forgo “partial triumphs in the immediate present.”<sup>49</sup>

## **Revolution**

Tucker’s writings advocated for a fundamental transformation of American society based on the labor theory of value and equal liberty. Tucker’s individualist anarchism is a revolutionary philosophy in the sense that it propounds radical or fundamental change in everyday life, in culture and ideology, and at more macro levels of society, economy, and polity. However, Tucker argued against revolution on many occasions as a strategy for political change because of its close association with the violent and authoritarian organizations and movements of the socialists and the communists. Although he was supportive of the First International and subsequent efforts to build a labor movement, Tucker argued that the Marxist revolutionary organizations and movements would do little more than reinforce the power of the state over society and individuals, thus reinstitutionalizing the principle of organizing social life through coercion. He thought it was absurd that socialist theory and practice would lead to a stateless society. “What Marx meant by the state is evident from the fact that his plan involved the establishment and maintenance of socialism—that is, the seizure of capital and public administration—by authoritative power.” “It is this dependence of Marx’s system upon authority” that prompted Tucker’s argument against the revolutionary movements of his time.<sup>50</sup>

The idea of revolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was premised upon the use of coercion by a hierarchically organized revolutionary organization that would lead collective action against the capitalist class. Once the capitalist class had been overthrown, the subsequent transformation of society would also be led by a revolutionary elite, which would now wield state power. The idea of hierarchically organized collective action against capitalists and the seizure of state power are both contrary to the basic philosophic stance of anarchism. Tucker commented on various occasions that among the anarchists, only the anarcho-communists, such as Peter Kropotkin, Johann Most, and Emma Goldman, argued for revolutionary change in the same way as the Marxists and

state socialists. The basic difference between the state socialists and the anarcho-communists was that the latter said they did not want to seize state power, but to destroy the state just as they appropriated capital. For Tucker, this was a contradiction since the appropriation of private property is based on the need to have an agent using force on behalf of the collectivity. The more individualist-oriented anarchists worked for self-liberation or social change through other means because they were unwilling to accept the coercion and discipline that characterized revolutionary movements. As far as Tucker was concerned there was no “half-way house between state socialism and anarchism.”<sup>51</sup> Just as the anarchists rejected the state socialist vision of society, they also opposed the political means sought by Marx and the state socialists.

In the 1880s, long before the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Tucker opposed revolution as a political strategy on the grounds that he believed it could not succeed militarily, especially for those movements that sought to promote both liberty and decentralization. In an 1881 essay on the anti-imperial struggles in Ireland, Tucker counseled against revolution because it meant certain defeat on the battlefield and “another century of misery and oppression” for the Irish.<sup>52</sup>

### **Terrorism or Propaganda by Deed**

Tucker generally counseled against the use of violence in political struggles, particularly the forms of violence employed by isolated individuals against innocent civilians. However, he discussed certain standards that were intended to help judge when violence is entirely appropriate in social life and in political struggles. For example, he believed that individuals and society have an absolute right to defend themselves from criminals, even to the point of supporting capital punishment for murders. In a response to critics of capital punishment titled, “A Word about Capital Punishment,” Tucker objects to the equivalence of murder and capital punishment, or the notion that the execution of a criminal by the state is equivalent to an act of murder by an individual criminal.<sup>53</sup> Murder is always an offensive, invasive act, while capital punishment is intended to be applied as a purely defensive act, to protect individuals and society from murderous criminals. True, capital punishment is often made into “a weapon of offense” by compulsory institutions, but that raises a separate question from the distinction of capital punishment from other forms of punishment. Tucker does not want to defend any of the horrors associated with capital punishment, but he argues that individuals and society have a right to defend themselves and may do so in whatever manner proves most effective.

It is odd to read an anarchist theorist defending one of the most definitive acts of violence on the part of governments, but Tucker’s primary point is

that force has an appropriate role in society when it is used defensively. Capital punishment is a form of institutionalized violence that theoretically functions to defend innocents, and this is the extent of Tucker's support for it. He refuses to preclude the use of terrorism and assassination stating that *Liberty* will not "set any limit on the right of an invaded individual to choose his own methods of defense."<sup>54</sup> He argues in favor of revolutionary violence against the invasive actions of governments in certain circumstances. In fact, in an 1887 article on "The Morality of Terrorism" Tucker says that terrorism and assassination are legitimate political methods to be "used against the oppressors of mankind only when they have succeeded in hopelessly repressing all peaceful methods of agitation."<sup>55</sup> If a government successfully reduces freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of peaceful assembly to a point where anarchists or libertarian forces have no opportunity to advocate for their philosophy, Tucker argues that terrorism and assassination are appropriate forms of political expression. He applied this standard when he discussed examples of revolutionary violence that occurred in Russia with the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 by the Peoples' Will, the attempted assassination of industrialist Henry Clay Frick by the anarcho-communist Alexander Berkman in 1892, and the Haymarket Riot and its aftermath in 1886. Tucker refuses to either condemn or praise the revolutionaries in Russia who pursued assassination as a political tool because he felt that they had little opportunity to achieve the goals of land reform and political freedom through rational discourse. He expresses no sympathy for Berkman's foolish attempt to kill Frick. He has little sympathy for the radicals responsible for murder of seven policemen in the Haymarket bombing in Chicago in 1886, because political realities in the United States afforded more opportunities for nonviolent agitation against capitalism and the state. In addition, the use of violence to resist oppression is not effective. He expresses enormous hostility to the trial and execution of the anarchists who, Tucker believed, were unfairly blamed for the Haymarket bombing.<sup>56</sup>

Tucker's most vituperative comments on political violence were not directed at any government, but at a group of anarcho-communists associated with Johann Most and his German-language newspaper *Freiheit*, which was published in New York City. In several articles published in 1886, Tucker exposed Most and some of his confederates as responsible, directly or indirectly, for a series of seven or eight fires in apartment buildings in New York City intended to scam insurance companies. Tucker alleged,

For nearly two years a large number of the most active members of the German group of the International Working People's Association in New York City, and of the Social Revolutionary Club, another German organization in that city, have been persistently engaged in getting money by insuring their

property for amounts far in excess of the real value thereof, secretly removing everything that they could, setting fire to the premises, swearing to heavy losses, and exacting corresponding sums from the insurance companies.<sup>57</sup>

Tucker lists the deaths and injuries caused by the arson and the gang members of the anarcho-communist groups responsible for these crimes. Tucker alleges that the persons convicted or awaiting trial for the crimes were “lieutenants” of Most. Tucker suspects that Most himself was not directly involved in the crimes but argues that his rhetoric and his refusal to condemn the criminals made him culpable. “He who is not against their crimes is for them.” Tucker laments the loss of life and property that resulted from the arson, but he was also furious at the impact that these crimes had on anarchism in public opinion. Tucker argues that anarchism, if it is to be a serious political alternative, cannot consort with, nor excuse thieves and murderers. There is a difference between killing the czar of Russia and killing and robbing an elderly woman, or burning women and children for insurance money. The anarcho-communists who set fire to a tenement house containing hundreds of human beings for insurance money are little more than “lazy, selfish, cowardly brutes.” They have nothing in common with the types of anarchists associated with *Liberty* for whom political change occurs when a critical mass of persons change institutional patterns out of conviction and principle, not out of coercion and intimidation. Tucker, who was often criticized by anarchist activists for his pacifism, wanted to leave room in the array of legitimate political methods for terrorism directed at capitalists and governmental officials, if extreme circumstances warranted, but he regularly argued against the use of violence.

The damage to anarchism in the press and in society was real and irreversible. Anarchist violence included the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901 by a deranged anarchist named Leon Czolgosz and the bombing of a café in Paris in 1894 by an anarchist named Émile Henry that killed and wounded several innocent diners. The accumulating horrors of bombings and assassinations by anarchists or related to anarchists in America and Europe forged a solid image in the minds of Americans of an inextricable link between anarchism and terrorist violence. Despite Tucker’s arguments to the contrary, the link was so strong that anarchism became synonymous with terrorism.<sup>58</sup>

### **Reform Communities or Colonization**

Tucker developed his thoughts about political practice in response to several important philosophic influences, one of which was Josiah Warren’s individualist recreation of Robert Owen’s socialism. Warren’s individual-

ism may have been an expression of the natural right tradition in American thought, but its direct origin was his participation in experimental communities that sought to reconstruct society based on the principle that "cost is the limit of price." Although Tucker drew many of his ideas on anarchism and socialism from Warren, he never evinced any enthusiasm for the method Warren and his colleagues employed in creating experimental or reform colonies. The basic methodological concept underlying Warren's anarchist communities is that libertarian ideas could be tested and refined in an experimental or controlled environment prior to their advocacy and implementation in the larger society. Warren and his supporters believed that isolated communities were in a better position to develop anarchist concepts of labor and equity because they did not have to drain their time, energy, and attention fighting social ostracism and political opposition. In an essay titled "Colonization" that he wrote for *Liberty* in 1884, Tucker argues that the artificial character of reform communities dooms them to failure from the start. There is no chance that a successful anarchist colony would ever be identified as such by the larger industrial and urban society because participants are always handpicked by the prime movers of a reform colony, and are thought to be more sympathetic to the goals of the colony from the outset. The broader society inevitably has a more restive, antagonistic population. It was for this reason that Tucker says that experiments testing anarchistic and socialistic ideas should not occur in isolated communities, but in the "very heart of existing industrial and social life."

He reasons that a large, heterogeneous city would be an ideal location for the creation of an alternative community of anarchists engaged in different trades and professions that could organize production and distribution on the "cost principle." The participants could agree to establish a bank complete with non-interest bearing currency for the conduct of commerce, allocating any accumulating capital in new enterprises. The advantages of such a system would become increasingly clear, even in a busy, disinterested urban environment. It might soon attract new adherents and broader interest in the cost principle and the sovereignty of the individual. Despite the flight of fancy in the notion of an urban, industrial colony, Tucker never promoted the notion because he knew that it would not really provide a fair test of anarchist concepts since alternative colonies could not shield its participants from capitalism and the state. He knew that meaningful social change would have to occur and effect the entirety of society. Furthermore, social transformation cannot occur without the abolition of the state and the four monopolies. By their very nature, reform colonies leave the core problems of monopoly capitalism untouched by assuming that they can change society simply by ignoring the most powerful social institutions. Tucker argues that the experiments

in creating anarchistic communities, or what he called, “social landscape gardening,” have a place in processes of social transformation. But experimentation needs to come after the abolition of the state and monopoly capital. Tucker says that he cares “nothing for any reform that cannot be effected right here in Boston among the everyday people whom I meet upon the streets.”<sup>59</sup>

### Passive Resistance

Passive resistance to authority is Tucker’s preferred political strategy. It is the third major principle of Tucker’s individualist anarchism. Since equal liberty and the right to own and control one’s product are fundamental precepts of social life, individuals and groups have the right to resist invasion of their liberty. Political authority is inherently invasive of both equal liberty and the right to one’s product. Thus, individuals and groups have a right to resist the state. Tucker outlines the elements of his strategy for change in an 1884 essay titled “The Power of Passive Resistance.” Passive resistance is the only reasonable form of political opposition in an era of statism, collectivism, and militarism. He argues that neither revolution nor terrorism are viable political strategies since the former only recreates the state in a new form, while the latter never produces meaningful results. Passive resistance pursues nonviolent political change through the refusal to obey. It does not contribute to the power and authority of the state. It does not require participation in a mob. It does not imply militarized solutions to social problems. The methods of passive resistance include the refusal to pay taxes, rent, or interest, to participate in electoral politics, and to cooperate with authorities in any aspect of daily life. Tucker suggests that no government can withstand the determined passive resistance to authority by even one-fifth of the population, since the other four-fifths would not want to pay what it would cost to get the one-fifth to cooperate.

Tucker’s commentaries on the struggles of ethnic minorities was an important source of his notion of passive resistance. He discussed the conflict between the British and the Irish in an editorial that appeared in *Liberty* in October 1881, which includes a critique of the domination of Ireland by Britain, a vision of an alternative future for Ireland, and a strategy for achieving it. “The Irish Situation in 1881” is vintage Tucker: brief, direct, clear, and uncompromising in the political strategy it advocates. Tucker says the Irish Land League is a model organization for anarchists since it employs the methods of passive resistance that can successfully defeat British colonialism and prefigure the birth of a new society based on the principles of equal liberty and the right of labor to its product. The Irish Land League was the “nearest approach, on a large scale, to perfect Anarchistic organization that the world has yet seen.”<sup>60</sup> The Land League

was comprised of many autonomous local groups, each in turn comprised of individuals of all ages, sexes, and races, who were inspired by a common purpose to eliminate British rule and redistribute the ownership and control of land to those who actually worked it.

Tucker urges the Irish Land League to continue using the methods of passive resistance and to avoid revolutionary and terrorist tactics in its struggle against Britain. Tucker specifically recommends that the members of the Irish Land League:

1. Refuse payment of all rent and all taxes now and hereafter;
2. Ignore the actions of the British parliament;
3. Abstain entirely from polls and any other form of political action;
4. Ostracize all deserters, cowards, traitors, and oppressors;
5. Agitate by voice and pen for disobedience to landlords and public officials; and
6. Passively resist every act of the police and military.

With his frequent hyperbole, Tucker predicts that "Liberty means certain, unhalting, and comparatively bloodless victory, the dawn of the sun of justice, and perpetual peace and justice for a hitherto blighted land." His advocacy of passive resistance foreshadowed the methodology of successful struggle against British colonialism in India, but it certainly did not adumbrate the form of political conflict that ensued in Ireland in the twentieth century, with mixed results. Tucker emphasizes that the strategy of passive resistance, in Ireland and elsewhere, means that those who would transform social relationships under colonial rule must prepare themselves to go to prison and continue the work of those who are sent to prison.

Passive resistance is a superior strategy to revolution or terrorism since the former means certain defeat for the Irish on the battlefield while the latter means years of demoralizing intrigue with a dubious outcome. Passive resistance is more consistent with the decentralist, anarchistic philosophy of the Land League than either revolutionary or terroristic actions. Passive resistance is more likely to be successful.

An insurrection is easily quelled; but no army is willing or able to train its guns on inoffensive people who do not even gather in the streets but stay at home and stand back on their rights. Neither the ballot nor the bayonet is to play any great part in the coming struggle; passive resistance and, in emergencies, the dynamite bomb in the hands of isolated individuals are the instrument by which the revolutionary force is destined to secure in the last great conflict the people's rights forever.<sup>61</sup>

For Tucker, passive resistance is a strategy for change that will help give birth to a new society based on the principle of equal liberty since it exem-



plifies practical resistance to authority without compromising any important anarchist principle. It is important to note, however, that Tucker relies on the benevolence of the security forces of monopoly capitalism to not train their “guns on inoffensive people” for the success of passive resistance. Tucker did not witness the extent to which modern governments will go to preserve or impose the social systems they favor. The history of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries demonstrates that there are no “inoffensive people” as far as governments are concerned and that there are no limits to what governments will do to preserve and expand their power. Tucker’s confidence in the beneficence of state power is an amusing relic of a privileged class in a much different America.

### BENJAMIN TUCKER AND THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

Tucker’s anarchism may be interpreted as a protest against both the exploitation of labor and the social disorder that the forces of modernity engendered in American society during the heyday of *Liberty* and the decades that preceded it. Tucker was horrified at the exploitation he observed in the concentration and centralization of land ownership, manufacturing, and finance capital. Important consequences of the concentration and centralization of wealth were the expulsion of farmers and agricultural workers from their traditional occupations, the dispossession of craftsmen and artisans from their tools with the rise of the factory system, and the forced migrations of millions of Americans to the cities. Tucker knew that the concentration and centralization of wealth in modern society were facilitated by the interaction of the state with class elites in agriculture, manufacturing, and finance. The modernization of American society meant the destruction of the traditional relationship between the individual and the means of production, and the destruction of the traditional relationship between the individual and others. Modernity undermined both bonds and, thereby, forced new relationships in economy, society, and polity. It also forced new thinking on the part of those who were disturbed by the new relationships. In the case of the individualist anarchists, the new thinking involved the reference and use of old, or available, ideas.

Tucker says in “State Socialism and Anarchism” that anarchists are simply “unterrified Jeffersonian democrats,” undoubtedly referring to Jefferson’s preference for the values and relationships of preindustrial, preurban, precapitalist America. Tucker expresses an interest in extending the idea of agrarian decentralism farther than Jefferson was willing to push it; that is, toward the elimination of government altogether. Tucker’s vision for the reconstruction of society is based on radical interpretations

of nascent American values of individualism, community, and relative autonomy from governmental control. Tucker was an opponent of many forms of collectivism, but there is also a recurring theme in his writings about the importance of community and its role in preserving the freedom of the individual. The notion of the importance of voluntary defensive associations in maintaining social order and ensuring economic equity are evidence that persons need the community to ensure that their rights and the need to ensure equity in economic exchanges. In his discussions about money and banking he clearly states that economic life, in particular, has a collective or cooperative dimension that cannot be ignored. For one thing, prosperity requires credit and credit is based on interpersonal trust, responsibility to others, and voluntary exchange.

Tucker's individualist anarchism, despite its threatening connotations, is actually a social theory that seeks to recreate the social bond and sense of community that modernity undermined. Tucker wanted the replacement of the social system that subjects individuals to the unmediated domination by capital and the state, with the reconstruction of the social bond that balances the rights and obligations of the individual with others. To achieve this goal, Tucker sought intellectual support from a variety of tendencies, including the natural rights tradition of American individualism, Proudhon's decentralist socialism, and Stirner's egoism. Tucker innovated largely by appropriating concepts and arguments from other writers and combining them into a new political-philosophic statement. The core of his individualist anarchism is the notion of "equal liberty," a concept of the self-other relationship and social order that Tucker can be credited with developing and using in a truly unique way.

There are several points at which Tucker's thought clearly converges with that of Stirner. Both understood that modernity meant that the state and capital melded into a unified whole. Both were critical of the constraints of tradition and culture on the behavior of persons. Both understood that modern socialism was little more than a new form of domination and exploitation. Socialism is not a rejection of modernity, but a streamlined version of it. Both understood that social revolution is unlikely to produce outcomes that differ significantly from the status quo. And both view societal transformation as a by-product of individual disobedience. But there are important differences between the two as well. Stirner does not articulate any notion of natural rights, he does not espouse any theory of value based on human labor, he is unconcerned about social order, and his discussion about the self-other relationship is ambiguous, at best.

Tucker's most significant departure from Stirner is also his most significant contribution to individualist, libertarian, and anarchist thought. His careful articulation of the notion of "equal liberty" makes it abundantly

clear that there is room in individualist anarchist thought for a concept of the self-other relationship based on reciprocity, mutuality, or an equality of everyday expectations, rights, and obligations. Tucker believed that his notion of “equal liberty” was entirely consistent with Stirner’s thought. However, not all individualists and egoists in Tucker’s period agreed with this assessment. In fact, Tucker’s philosophy initiated an extended controversy among the egoists who believed that Stirner’s thought was a type of *anarchism* and those who believed that it was a type of *archism*. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the controversies that Tucker’s view of Stirner provoked among egoists who, like Tucker, have a favorable view of Stirner but who disagreed on the compatibility of egoism and anarchism.

## NOTES

1. The notion of “archism” emerged in the debates among egoists and individualist anarchists in the late nineteenth century as a way to characterize Stirner’s view of the self-other relationship. Stirner views “rights” as something given by an external authority and, thus, contradict his concept of “ownness” whether it is applied to the self or the other. However, he also refers to “reciprocity” in his discussion of the union of egoists. See *The Ego and Its Own*, 275, for statements suggesting that the union of egoists is characterized by norms of reciprocity.

2. For discussions about Tucker’s life, see James J. Martin, *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827–1908* (Colorado Springs, CO: Ralph Myles, 1970), 202–8; Wendy McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 1–15; William Lloyd, “Memories of Benjamin Tucker,” <http://mises.org/article.aspx?Id=697&FS=Memories+of+Benjamin+Tucker> (accessed August 8, 2009); and Paul Avrich’s interview with Oriole Tucker, Benjamin Tucker’s daughter, in *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 148–52.

3. See McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 6, for Tucker’s grasp of German. For Tucker’s comments on the English publication of *The Ego and Its Own* see Benjamin Tucker, “On Picket Duty,” *Liberty* 16 (April 1907): 1.

4. Benjamin Tucker, *Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One: A Fragmentary Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism* (1897; repr., New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1969), and Benjamin Tucker, “The Attitude of Anarchism toward Industrial Combinations,” in Franklin H. Head, *Speeches, Debates, and Resolutions: Civic Federation Conference on Trusts* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1899), 253–59. Tucker’s critique of trusts is also available online at <http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/tucker/tucker35.html>.

5. See Martin, *Men Against the State*, 249–61, and McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 51–67. Tucker’s writings have been reproduced in numerous anthologies of anarchist writings. Scholarly studies of the philosophical aspects of Tucker’s individualist anarchism are few. In addition to Martin and McElroy, see Carl Watner, “Benjamin Tucker and His Periodical *Liberty*,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 1 (1977): 307–18; Wendy McElroy, “Benjamin Tucker, *Liberty*, and Individualist Anarchism,”

*Independent Review* 2 (Winter 1988): 421–34; Victor Yarros, “Philosophical Anarchism: Its Rise, Decline, and Eclipse,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 41 (January 1936): 470–83; Murray Rothbard, “The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist’s View,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 20 (Winter 2006): 5–15; and Kevin Carson, *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy* (New York: BookSurge Publishing, 2007). For a compendium of essays on Tucker, see Michael E. Coughlin, Charles H. Hamilton, and Mark A. Sullivan, *Benjamin Tucker and the Champions of Liberty: A Centenary Anthology* (St. Paul, MN: Michael E. Coughlin, n.d.).

6. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 9, 15.
7. McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 6–7.
8. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, vol. 1 (1776; repr., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1976), 47.
9. Josiah Warren *Equitable Commerce: A New Development of Principles* (1852; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1967) and *True Civilization* (1863; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1967).
10. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847; repr., New York: Progress Publishers, 1975); Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *The System of Economic Contradictions, or the Philosophy of Poverty* (1847; repr., Boston: Benjamin Tucker, 1888).
11. Proudhon, *What Is Property?* 13.
12. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 61.
13. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 61.
14. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 23.
15. McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 17.
16. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 14–15.
17. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 17–18.
18. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 24.
19. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 65.
20. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 62–63.
21. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 58–60; Paul Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists: Ideas and Teachings of Seven Major Thinkers* (1908; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 186.
22. There are significant differences in the political philosophies of John Locke, Ayn Rand, Murray Rothbard, Robert Nozick, and Benjamin Tucker. However, each based arguments on the state and individual liberty in a concept of natural law and natural right. Tucker differs from the others in that he intended to move away from arguments based on natural law and natural right, but he does not accomplish that in his political economy. See John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (1689; repr., Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005), 130–32, 143, 173, 186; Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 114–16, 125–34; Murray Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (1982; repr., New York: New York University Press, 2002), 21–24; and Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 10, 28–29.
23. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 9.
24. Tucker, “The Attitude of Anarchism toward Industrial Combinations,” 1.
25. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 10.

26. Carson, *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy*, 185.
27. Tucker, "The Attitude of Anarchism toward Industrial Combinations," 3.
28. McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 126.
29. Lysander Spooner, *Constitutional Law Relative to Credit, Currency and Banking* (Boston: Joseph B. Ripley, 1843). This pamphlet is available online at <http://lysanderspooner.org/node/20>. Also see McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 127.
30. Lysander Spooner, *A New System of Paper Currency* (Boston: Stacey and Richardson, 1861). This pamphlet is available online at <http://lysanderspooner.org/node/40>. Also see McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 127.
31. Martin, *Men Against the State*, 125–38; McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 130–32. William B. Greene, *Mutual Banking* (1849; repr., New York: Gordon Press, 1974). *Mutual Banking* is available online at [www.the-portal.org/mutual\\_banking.htm](http://www.the-portal.org/mutual_banking.htm).
32. Martin, *Men Against the State*, 131–32, and McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 131.
33. Greene, *Mutual Banking*, 19.
34. Tucker, "The Attitude of Anarchism toward Industrial Combinations," 3.
35. Tucker's position is summarized on pages 10 and 11 in *Instead of a Book*. Although he is quite friendly to the politics of individualist anarchism, Murray Rothbard developed a devastating critique of the argument that mutual banking would lead to an increase in the money supply and the disappearance of interest. Rothbard argues that the opposite would happen: it would lead to a harder and more restricted supply of money and credit. If there were no government-manipulated credit expansion, there would be a higher rate of interest. Forms of currency that do not have general acceptance and are not based on commodities, or that are developed "out of thin air," tend to disappear "into thin air." See Rothbard, "The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 20 (Winter 2006): 5–15. From the standpoint of contemporary political economy, the mutual banking argument seems extremely naïve, but it has articulate proponents who disagree with Rothbard. See Carson, *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy*, 185–89.
36. Joshua K. Ingalls, *Social Wealth: The Sole Factor in Its Acquisition and Apportionment* (New York: Social Science Publishing Company, 1885), 286–300.
37. Tucker, "The Attitude of Anarchism toward Industrial Combinations," 3.
38. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 12.
39. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 13.
40. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 13.
41. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 180–88.
42. Tucker, "The Attitude of Anarchism toward Industrial Combinations," 4.
43. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 233–36.
44. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 221–23. Stirner's main criticism of *What Is Property?* appears on these pages, but there are criticisms of Proudhon scattered throughout *The Ego and Its Own*. Stirner attacked Proudhon on page 223 on an "embarrassing question": Is "the concept of theft at all possible unless one allows validity to the concept of property?" Marx does not reference Stirner when he poses the same question about Proudhon's concept of property as theft in an article that appeared in *The Social Democrat* in 1865. Marx's essay is reproduced as an appendix in an early English version of Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847; repr., Chicago: Charles Kerr, 1910), 195–96. Of course, Marx and Stirner responded to Proudhon's contradiction in diametrically opposed fashions.

45. Tucker, *The Attitude of Anarchism toward Industrial Combinations*, 6.
46. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 348.
47. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 427.
48. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 418.
49. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 426.
50. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 376.
51. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 16–17.
52. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 415.
53. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 156–57.
54. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 428.
55. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 428.
56. Tucker wrote no fewer than seven editorials in *Liberty* condemning not only the Haymarket bombing itself but the subsequent trial and execution of the anarchists. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 439–52. For a lengthy discussion of Tucker's views on revolutionary violence, see Morgan Edwards, "Neither Bombs nor Ballots: *Liberty* and the Strategy of Anarchism," in Michael Coughlin, Charles Hamilton, and Mark Sullivan, *Benjamin Tucker and the Champions of Liberty: A Centenary Anthology* (St. Paul, MN: Michael Coughlin, n.d.), 65–91.
57. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 431.
58. See Yarros, "Philosophical Anarchism," 473–74, and McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 32–33, for discussions of the impatience of Tucker's readers with his philosophic, pacifist approach to social change.
59. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 423–24.
60. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 411–13.
61. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 413–14.





# Reciprocity and Predation in Everyday Life: The Egoist Thought of James L. Walker

## NEW VOICES IN THE EGOIST INSURRECTION

From the mid-1880s until its closure in 1908, *Liberty* attracted devotees of a variety of theoretical tendencies. In addition to the writings of the Tuckerites, *Liberty* also published articles developed by very strict, anti-Stirner natural rights anarchists, as well as those by an emerging group of intellectuals who took a more thoroughly Stirnerite perspective than Tucker and his colleagues. Stirner's sense of history and his critique of the proclivity of modernist institutions and movements to absorb the individual were important elements of the egoist insurrection that began half a century after the publication of *The Ego and Its Own*, and lasted well beyond the demise of *Liberty* into the first quarter of the twentieth century.

A confluence of social and intellectual forces in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century helped produce a revival of interest in Stirner and the basic ideas that helped develop this new form of egoist thought. The success of *Liberty* and a proliferation of small egoist, anarchist, and atheist journals in America and Europe that discussed egoist ideas expressed and helped generate new interest in Stirner's thought. In America, journals like *Egoism* and *Lucifer* abandoned any interest in natural rights philosophies and expunged all forms of socialism, intending to focus on the development of a strictly egoist line of reasoning. Similar efforts emerged in Great Britain and Europe through journals such as *The Eagle and the Serpent*, *The Egoist*, and *L'Anarchie*. As a result, new voices for egoism began to emerge from within the individualist anarchist community. James L. Walker in the United States, Dora Marsden in Great Britain,



and Émile Armand in France were increasingly identified as significant public intellectuals who developed an egoist interpretation of politics, culture, and society. Even within *Liberty*, new egoist challenges to the more traditional natural rights approach to anarchism and socialism arose from writers such as John Badcock and John Beverley Robinson.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1880s and 1890s, John Henry Mackay, a Scots-German poet, novelist, and gay rights activist dedicated himself to reviving interest in Stirner. Through his articles and novels, especially *The Anarchists* and *The Freedomseeker*, Mackay helped publicize Stirner's ideas. He published a German language biography of Stirner in 1897, *Max Stirner: His Life and His Work*, fifty-three years after the publication of *The Ego and Its Own*. He is credited with rescuing Stirner from his obscurity and popularizing his life and work. Of course, Byington's translation of *The Ego and Its Own* did not appear until 1907. The publication of both works within a decade raised interest in Stirner. Mackay's novels *The Anarchists: A Study of Civilization at the Close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* and *The Freedomseeker: A Psychology of Development* are literary statements of a Stirnerite perspective on individualist anarchism and its interpretation of the forms of class and political domination prevalent in nineteenth century Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The interest in Friedrich Nietzsche in Europe and America during these decades helped lay a foundation for broader interest in the egoist critique of modernity. The specific nature of Nietzsche's intellectual relationship with Stirner is a fascinating topic in its own right, but Nietzsche's thought is as independent as it is profound. During the 1880s and 1890s, Stirner had yet to be translated into English. Consequently, direct knowledge about Stirner's work in Great Britain and America was limited to those radical intellectuals, like James L. Walker, who were proficient in German. Nietzsche's major works were not only published during those two decades, but significant commentary about his writings was also published and circulated throughout Europe and America. Nietzsche's atheism and egoism prompted inquiry into Stirner because of interest in the question of whether the author of *The Ego and Its Own* was a precursor to Nietzsche or, at least, a compatible thinker.<sup>3</sup>

The practical consequences of collectivist struggles against capitalism were becoming increasingly apparent to social scientists and the public alike. Evidence began accumulating that individuals really did not matter to collectivist revolutionaries or to the socialist and labor elites. The debacles of the First and Second Internationals demonstrated that individual liberty and egalitarianism were the last things that interested the socialist movement. Once it was put under critical scrutiny, egalitarianism itself looked like a sham created by intellectuals to secure places for themselves in the hierarchies of the state and labor movements. Among many intellectuals and artists, a critical attitude toward labor, socialist, and collectiv-

ist movements of all types began to emerge. Within the social sciences, the Italian political scientist Gaetano Mosca published his treatise, *The Ruling Class*, in 1896 which demolished the notion that democratic and socialist movements could eradicate social stratification. In 1908, the German libertarian sociologist Franz Oppenheimer threw cold water on the emerging Marxist sociologies in *The State*, by refuting the socialist argument that the proletarian seizure of government was the initial step in the creation of a democratic and egalitarian society. In his 1911 study, *Political Parties*, Roberto Michels reported on the "iron law of oligarchy," the process in which democratic organizations inevitably displace their humanistic, egalitarian goals and develop oligarchic and autocratic structures. The Italian sociologist and economist Vilfredo Pareto published *The Mind and Society* in 1917, which concluded that social change does not really signify progress to greater democratization or egalitarianism, but a "circulation of elites" in which groups of elites vie with each other for *desiderata*.<sup>4</sup>

With the exception of Oppenheimer's study of the historical transformations of the state, none of these works were directly supportive of libertarian, anarchist, or egoist ideas. Their major consequence was that they intellectually undermined the notion that alienation and domination could be overcome through the simplistic strategies of Marxism or the collectivist and individualist forms of anarchism. For those who sought a more hospitable environment for the individual ego, none of the radical movements of the day seemed satisfactory. Even less so, after they had been assailed by Mosca, Oppenheimer, Michels, and Pareto. Egoism, however, remained a viable option and Stirner was its intriguing theorist.

This chapter examines the egoist thought of James L. Walker. Walker is a significant figure in the history of egoist thought from the 1880s to the early 1890s because he wrote the first book in English about egoism. His book *The Philosophy of Egoism* supplemented many essays he wrote for atheist, anarchist, and egoist journals.<sup>5</sup> *The Philosophy of Egoism* developed an organized discussion of egoist concepts, a Stirnerite critique of cultural norms and political institutions, and an encouragement to resistance to both ideological and physical forms of coercion individuals experience in everyday life. Walker was without a doubt the most notable egoist thinker in the United States from the mid-1880s through the first decade of the 1890s. Even Benjamin Tucker acknowledged the pre-eminence of Walker's scholarship and the influence of his writings on a community that was hungry for an elaboration and application of Stirner's ideas. Although the two differed in their assessments of natural rights, anarchism, Proudhon, and the notion of equal liberty, Tucker displayed a reluctance to challenge Walker with the usual verve and invective directed toward his adversaries.

## JAMES L. WALKER AND *THE PHILOSOPHY OF EGOISM*

James L. Walker was born in Manchester, England, in 1845, but emigrated to the United States with his parents when he was a child. His wealthy parents ensured that he received a liberal education through study in England, France, and Germany. He earned a doctorate and became a proficient speaker and reader of ten languages. After completing his education in Europe, he was employed as a reporter and editor for the *London Times*. He returned to the United States during the Civil War and became an associate editor for the *Chicago Times*. He married a young woman named Katharine Smith in 1865. Walker reports that he became an atheist early in the 1860s and soon recognized that if there were no "Moral Lawgiver" there could be no "Moral Commandments." That is, atheism must lead to some form of egoism that denies the legitimacy of external strictures on the thoughts and behaviors of persons. But Walker found "a false note" among that the atheists he associated with since they typically adopted a "religion of Humanity with a Morality not less impressive upon the conscience with theology, purer because freed from superstition." The belief among the atheists was that "self-love" was the foundation of all morality, but "the drift of their discourses was that good morals would grow out of self-love and still the morals were Christian morals."<sup>6</sup> From the standpoint of a critical egoist philosophy, Walker asked, what sort of change is it for a person to reject a belief in God only to resurrect God in the form of an orthodox humanist morality that replicates Christian ethics? Walker rejected the philosophy of the atheists and humanists who refused or neglected to pursue the goals of the "iconoclastic propaganda" of egoism, and who tended to settle down into "a selfish individual, a nonentity of ordinary morals."

In the autobiographical comments that appear at the close of *The Philosophy of Egoism*, Walker reports that as a young man he was also dissatisfied with the type of egoism that encouraged "grubbing for advantages over other people; certain that it was my pleasure or prudence which impelled me to any act." He could not accept either the notion that atheists are governed by a cosmic sense of justice or the idea that they merely seek their own pleasure. His goal was to seek out and develop an alternative view of the relationship between atheism and egoism. He reasoned that there must be a body of ideas that provides a better direction for individuals who choose to live without subordinating themselves to either religion or humanism, mysticism or materialism. Moreover, he intended to develop a new concept of egoism based on the choices, convictions, and subjectivity of individuals that would challenge the traditional concepts promulgated by materialist philosophers, such as Lucretius, Epicurus, Hobbes, and Bentham.<sup>7</sup> Walker believed that philosophy needed to tran-

scend the restrictive opposition between ethics based on an abstract, alienating moral codes that derived their authority from mystical sources in either the cosmos or nature, and the materialist perspectives that reduce human beings to pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding mechanisms.

Walker began his career as a critical political philosopher in 1863 when he briefly published an atheist and anarchist newspaper called the *Free-thinker* in Chicago. The paper apparently "gathered a considerable list of subscribers," especially among workers and small merchants in the city. Walker was not able to maintain the publication because of poor health. He and his wife moved to San Antonio, Texas, in search of drier air and milder temperatures in 1865. He worked at various times as a writer and editor for newspapers in San Antonio, Austin, and Galveston. He also became licensed to practice medicine in Texas. He was the author of works on chemistry, medicine, and civil engineering during his years as a newspaperman. He and his wife eventually settled in Monterey, Mexico, where he practiced medicine and ran a weekly newspaper for American expatriates.<sup>8</sup>

It was not until 1872 that Walker first learned about Max Stirner. "Until the spring of 1872 I had no knowledge of Max Stirner's work, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. But believe me that I devoured it as soon as I got hold of it." Walker was amazed at the similarity between Stirner's opus and the ideas that he was laboring to develop. "There for the first time I saw most plainly stated, my own thought, borne out by illustrations that will test the nerve of every professed Egoist."<sup>9</sup> Although he was proficient in German and translated sections of *The Ego and Its Own* for his own writings, Walker never provided his own detailed commentary on *The Ego and Its Own*, but began infusing Stirner's concepts into his new writings and revising his previous work on egoism.

Walker argues that one of the most significant aspects of Stirner's work is that it encouraged individuals to understand themselves in an historical context. Correlatively, the tensions and problems within egoist thought must also be understood historically. Stirner divided human history into roughly three periods: antiquity, or the domination of persons by material forces; modernity, or the domination of persons by the "tyranny of the Idea" which supposes that every material object is inhabited by a spook or spirit; and an unnamed era in which the rule of ideas is broken. Walker defines Stirner's unique one, as "yourself, just as you are in flesh and blood, become simply sovereign, disdainful of all rule of ideas, as Christ was disdainful of all rule of material powers."<sup>10</sup> Part of the excitement about Stirner's thought is that it develops a new form of egoism, one that did not subordinate the individual to either the pleasure principle or to the "religion of humanity."

Walker published many articles in an array of newspapers and small egoist, atheist, and anarchist journals, including *Egoism* and *Lucifer*. In

1886 he published the first of several dozen articles in *Liberty*. Writing under the pseudonym, Tak Kak, Walker provided Benjamin Tucker and *Liberty* with a stream of analysis and commentary that consistently espoused a Stirnerite perspective on many of the topics that concerned the individualist anarchist community at the time, including the debates over natural rights, intellectual property, monopoly capitalism, and critique of government. Tucker credited Walker with being an important source of the incipient interest in Stirner in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Tucker said in his introduction to the 1907 edition of the first English translation of *The Ego and Its Own*,

The memory of Max Stirner had been virtually extinct for an entire generation. But in the last two decades there has been a remarkable revival of interest both in the book and its author. It began in this country with a discussion in the pages of the anarchist periodical, *Liberty* in which Stirner's thought was clearly expounded and vigorously championed by Dr. James L. Walker, who adopted for this discussion the pseudonym Tak Kak.<sup>11</sup>

Walker's contributions to *Liberty* were provocative and forceful expressions of Stirner's form of egoism. On many occasions, Walker would taunt the anarchists who were oriented toward a natural rights philosophy with outrageous statements designed to demolish the philosophic pretense he felt was prevalent among radical intellectuals at the time. Several of these essays made significant contributions to egoist theory, or provided important clarifications of arcane aspects of egoist thought. Although he frequently distanced himself from Walker's arguments, Tucker was intrigued by Walker's approach to ethical questions and credited him with developing an individualist perspective on ethics that succeeded in refining the notion of individual sovereignty originally propounded by Josiah Warren, Stephen Pearl Andrews, and William Lloyd Garrison. "Tak Kak" was especially adept at refuting arguments that based ethics and politics on natural rights and appeals to "duty." His most important publishing project on egoism occurred in 1890 and 1891, when the small Stirnerite journal named *Egoism*, edited by his friends Henry and Georgia Replogle, published twelve essays that would later become the first part of Walker's important book, *The Philosophy of Egoism*.<sup>12</sup>

Walker's early essays on egoist philosophy were oriented toward a systematic articulation of basic concepts and first principles, a much different approach than the more circuitous Hegelian, historical method that Stirner employed in *The Ego and Its Own*. Walker begins with the definitions of terms; Stirner usually defines terms during a discussion of their expression in history and society. Walker proceeds by laying out definitions of the important terms that he plans to use, discusses the nature of knowledge and society, and even provides a statement of purpose for the

discussion that ensues. Walker understands egoism to be a practical philosophy that helps individuals navigate everyday life, minimizing abuse from social institutions and other individuals. Egoism is a practical philosophy in the sense that it helps individuals understand the authentic motivations for their actions, opposing these to internal and external forms of constraint, such as "conscience," or external motivations which usually appear in the guise of "duty" to church, state, or nation.

Walker's initial essays on egoism have an historical significance in individualist literature because he was the first to advocate for egoism as a practical philosophy for how people can live their lives. However, he also believes that egoism, a form of practical ethics, can be reconciled with altruistic, or "other regarding" behavior. An irreconcilable opposition between egoism and self-sacrifice appears in Stirner's writings in the concepts of "ownness" and "self-renunciation." The opposition between egoism and altruism appears in Nietzsche's opposition of the master and slave moralities. The opposition between egoism and altruism becomes a central antagonism in more contemporary egoist thought, particularly that of Ayn Rand. In Walker's case, egoism is the negation of "moralism." While clearly different from egoism, altruism plays a somewhat different role in Walker's philosophy than in Nietzsche or Rand.

Another significant quality of Walker's egoist thought is that he does not argue for "archism" of any sort. Although he does not accept Tucker's notion of "equal liberty" based on natural rights or moral absolutes. Walker says that egoism implies a rethinking of the self-other relationship, nothing less than "a complete revolution in the relations of mankind" that avoids both the "archist" principle that legitimates domination and the "moralist" notion that elevates self-renunciation to a virtue. Walker describes himself as an "egoistic anarchist" who believed in both contract and cooperation as practical principles to guide everyday interactions. He is clearly a Stirnerite. He does not combine Stirner with Proudhon, and he is very careful to differentiate his philosophy from any sort of supremacism, particularly that of Nietzsche.

Walker's friend, Henry Replogle, the editor of *Egoism*, comments that Walker "was one of the most lovable of men: calm, courteous, profound, and yet humorous upon occasion, but never light. In conversation, every proposition was an appeal to reason; there was no cramming the assumptions of authority down the mental throat."<sup>13</sup> Walker died in 1904 in Nuevo Laredo, from smallpox he contracted during his travels in Mexico. At the time of his death, Walker was attempting to finalize *The Philosophy of Egoism*. Katherine Walker and Henry Replogle completed and polished the manuscript using Walker's notes as their guide. The book was published in 1905 in Denver by Katherine Smith with assistance from Henry and Georgia Replogle. *The Philosophy of Egoism* was enthusiastically ap-

plauded by egoists in the United States and Great Britain as the first systematic statement of an egoistic anarchist philosophy, especially for those egoists who could not accept the natural rights foundation of the individualist anarchism of Benjamin Tucker and his colleagues. Walker was identified as the “Father of Egoism in America,” although the acclaim was eclipsed with the 1907 publication of Byington’s English translation of *The Ego and Its Own*.<sup>13</sup> Despite the massive interest, pro and con, in the English version of Stirner’s work, *The Philosophy of Egoism* was still regarded as an impressive statement of egoist thought that reflected a Stirnerite point of view, but which also developed egoism in some new directions. On the occasion of Walker’s death, Tucker said,

His was a peculiarly clear and logical mind, and his articles on egoism, to the philosophy of which he devoted a great deal of thought and attention, were cogently reasoned and exceptionally readable. He was a thinker of rare qualities, and much that he has written is worthy of being printed in permanent form.<sup>14</sup>

Walker’s discussion of egoism as a philosophy of practical behavior, his argument for anarchism, and his effort to reconstruct the self-other relationship are the most pertinent aspects of his egoist philosophy for a study of Stirner’s intellectual offspring.

### PHILOSOPHY, PURPOSE, AND METHOD

Walker argues that philosophy and “intellectual discussion” are directed by an interest in shaping how people behave in everyday life, excluding “scholastic exercises” and efforts to “sharpen the wits.” He says that “[w]e seek understanding of facts for guidance in action, for avoidance of mistake and suffering, and even for resignation to the inevitable.” Moreover, his readers in *Egoism*, *Lucifer*, and *Liberty* have “life forces strong enough” that their encounters with egoist thought are likely to prompt “action which shall move things.” The basic purpose of an egoist philosophy is ultimately to articulate the *laissez-faire* principle as a remedy for the problems of social conflict, war, persecution, and physical catastrophes such as famine and disease. The principal problems confronting human beings are all related in some way to bigotry and fanaticism, or “the determination of mankind to interfere with each others’ actions.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, his goal is to develop a philosophy of egoism that results in a stateless society. Egoism is not identical with anarchism nor the idea of *laissez-faire*, but “the prevalence of egoism will reduce interference, even by the ignorant, to the dimensions of their more undeniable interest in others’ affairs, eliminating every motive of a fanatical character.”<sup>16</sup> Egoism is the

“seed-bed” of a policy and habit of noninterference and tolerance. Ultimately, the egoist promotion of a laissez-faire attitude toward others supports and reinforces an anarchist social system. In its “strict and proper sense,” anarchy means “no tyranny” and implies the regulation and coordination of social interaction by voluntary contract.

Walker shares with the individualist anarchists the goal of social interactions based on contract and mutualism, but he rejects the natural rights methodology that even Benjamin Tucker, for all of his protests to the contrary, could not escape. In his first article in *Liberty* in 1886, Walker attacks the idea of “justice,” which is the foundation of the natural rights argument for anarchism, especially in the thought of Lysander Spooner and the early writings of Tucker himself.<sup>17</sup> Walker argues that it is futile to set up and obey an abstract notion, such as justice, that requires individuals to treat all other individuals alike, or according to a fixed standard. Persons are not alike. They are not equally able or willing to reciprocate with each other. Justice has no meaning apart from a voluntary contract, a union of egoists. Short of a union of egoists, humans are indirectly enslaved by their “deference to ideas.” For instance, the notion that slavery is unjust is useless because it implies that there is a rule or law against it that has sufficient power to prevent it throughout all time and space. The facts of history, however, suggest something different. What really matters is the power and the will of individuals to resist enslavement; the egoist respects “vicious” resistance. Therefore, there is more virtue in the criminal classes than in the tame slaves because criminals reject the notion that they are duty bound to respect the laws and rules of government or even natural society.

“Justice” is the snare of natural society because it entails a requirement that individuals recognize a duty to the “powers who control me instead of bargaining with me.”<sup>18</sup> The egoist rejects all such notions of duty and is indifferent to the hardships of the oppressed whose consent to their oppression enslaves not only them, but those who do not consent. The egoist is at war with “natural society” and, hence, the notion of justice.

As the laws of society, and the state, one of its forms, are tyrannies of disagreeable impediments to me and I see no difficulty in discarding them, but your respect for ideas such as “right,” “wrong,” “justice,” etc., I would have you consider that these are merely words with vague, chimerical meanings, as there is no moral government of the world, but only an evolutionary process, and it depends upon perception of this fact, and self-direction of our individual powers united as we shall agree, how we can succeed in obtaining and enjoying more or less of the things of this world.<sup>19</sup>

For the egoist, there is no hell, no natural society, and no justice. These are only ideas that are elevated to the status of “spooks.” The facts of human experience are based in the power and will of human beings to act



upon nature and each other in their everyday life. Human beings act on the basis of their ideas, but their ideas may inhibit or enhance their ability to enjoy “the things of this world.”

Methodologically, the egoist comes to self-consciousness, not for the Lord’s sake, not for humanity’s sake, but for his or her own sake. It is essential to dismiss the idea that there is any justice in nature “other than force seeking the least line of resistance” in obtaining goals or serving one’s interests. The recognition that there is no natural justice or any idea of justice other than the facts of human existence is likely to “save generations of complaining and begging” which are futile expressions of subservience. The egoist intends to perceive the facts and processes of nature without “colored glass before our eyes.” Cooperation and reciprocity are possible only among those who are unwilling to appeal to fixed patterns of justice in human relationships and instead focus on a form of reciprocity, a union of egoists, in which person each finds pleasure and fulfillment in doing things for others. The egoist digs for the “bottom facts” of nature and society and disdains the layering of artificial rules and ideas over society and individuality.

Egoism, therefore, includes a six-point methodology for the critique of politics, society, and culture:

1. Human society and the lives of individuals are replete with artificiality, perversion, and misery that is engendered by fanaticism, interference, and intolerance;
2. The worst of this fanaticism, interference, and intolerance has no chance of perpetuation except through a certain belief in its social necessity or inevitability;
3. The belief in the necessity of fanaticism, interference, and intolerance arises from social norms that acquire an aura of justice and beneficence promoted by predatory elites controlling major social institutions, such as the church and the state;
4. The artificiality of how persons understand themselves, interact with each other, and act collectively can be reduced or minimized;
5. Egoism helps expose or bracket the artificiality so that persons can understand the real sources of their behavior and the full range of possibility and freedom; and
6. This is accomplished by first understanding that the rules and ideas people live by are humanly constructed, not fixed in nature or the cosmos, and that they can be resisted and overcome by the power and will of the human ego.<sup>20</sup>

Walker is quick to point out that those who are oppressed but accept their oppression as natural or appropriate are not to be pitied or indulged

by the egoist. "I recognize no duty toward the powers that control me instead of bargaining with me. I am indifferent to the annihilation of the serfs whose consent enslaves me along with themselves."<sup>21</sup> The oppressed who accept their oppression as just or prudent are as much a part of the problem as their masters because they help replicate the intrusion and intolerance individuals face in everyday life. The egoist has no praise for the masters and no pity for the servants.

Walker rejects prevailing definitions of egoism not only because they are disparaging but because they are inadequate to understanding the nature of individual behavior, particularly the role of the self and the mind. First, egoism is not mere self-interest or selfishness. The tendency of philosophy and popular culture to reduce the meaning of egoism to interpreting everything in relation to one's interests or sense of importance is inherently meaningless. The individual's self-interests and sense of importance cannot be anything other than "all important to the individual." Is the rejection of egoism based on the argument that the person's interests in objects and other persons are not to be understood? It is impossible for anyone to judge or evaluate anything, including egoism, without the self taking an interest in it and without having sense of its importance. The self is the source of interest and value.

Second, egoism is not hedonism or eudemonism. Intelligent egoists are prudent, rational, and balanced. They are not slaves to passion, pleasure, or immediate gratification. They are willing to postpone "immediate ends" in order to reach egoistic goals of higher value. Value cannot be reduced to immediate pleasure or gratification. The egoist may judge that the most valuable objects, actions, and relationships, and not those that bring immediate pleasure or value. They may require short-term pain and struggle to bring long-term rewards.

Third, egoism cannot be reduced to greed, avarice, or purposeless accumulation. "The love of money within reason is conspicuously an egoistic manifestation, but when the passion gets the man, when money becomes his ideal, his god, we must class him as an altruist" because he has sacrificed his ability to assign value to the power of an external object.<sup>22</sup>

Pre-Stirnerite definitions of egoism describe circumstances in which the person is appropriated by passion or objects. Egoism is actually the person's appropriation of passions and objects, not the other way around. Religion, humanism, and predialectical views of egoism invert the relationship between the human subject and the inert object. Objects become subjects, and vice versa. Stirner's form of egoism reestablishes the appropriate relationship between subject and object. In the end, what really defines egoism is not mere self-interest, pleasure, or greed; it is the sovereignty of the individual, the full expression of the subjectivity of the individual ego.

Walker believes that egoism is better understood as “the principle of the self; the doctrine of individuality,” or “the theory of the will as reaction of the self to a motive.” His idea is that the self, not any mysterious soul or spirit, organizes the person’s thoughts and behavior in response to many internal and external influences. Walker’s principle of the self or doctrine of individuality recognizes that individuals must think and behave in an environment in which external entities and other people are acting upon them. The self is the person’s faculty that directs interest and assigns importance to these external influences, organizing perceptions, thoughts, and actions. It is the person’s intentionality, or ability to identify purpose and value. Walker’s egoism, while acknowledging that there are some involuntary reactions of the person to the environment, is based on an interactionist idea that the individual chooses, through the self, what to think and feel, and how to act, in response to internal and external stimuli. Egoism conceives the self as the “spring of action,” not the content of behavior. It is the person’s intent to act upon the world, rather than the infinite acquiescence to objectification. Thus, in order to understand egoism, the focus must be on the self as the “spring of action,” or the self as the locus of the person’s intentionality.

Egoism is concerned with the person’s relationship to self, and the person’s relationship with others. Walker is most interested in the relationship of the person to the social world, especially how the self navigates encounters with “groups variously cemented together by controlling ideas; such groups are families, tribes, states, and churches.” The objective side of egoist philosophy is the search for social environments that minimize any interference and intolerance that constrains the self in its interaction with the world. The basic question that concerns the egoist is, to what extent do these different social environments function without the constraint of some of their members by others? Historically, these groups have been based on the “disproportionate powers and influence,” the physical and mental domination of most members by some. A major reason why these groups are asymmetrically controlled is because of “prevailing beliefs reducible to ignorance, awe, and submission in the mass of members.” Also, “Egoism deals with facts, [it] breaks and dissolves the dominion of ideas.” The egoist acts to gratify self, but not from a “foreign motive.”<sup>23</sup>

Following Stirner’s analysis of “causes,” Walker argues that the family, the church, the nation, the government, and other “composite individualities” typically attempt to develop an “egoistic” or “selfy” character in response to the intentions of dominant members. As the collective entity or social organization develops a “composite ego,” the members are treated as inert matter, deprived of their ability to act on their own. Persons are prompted to resign their “self-care” or renounce their individuality and personal needs for the presumed good of the collective, or because

the collective is thought to serve the material, social, and psychological needs of individuals. Or, they renounce themselves only outwardly in order to protect inwardly a sense of self. The expressions of egoism become very primitive: individuals submit in order to avoid punishments and survive materially. These organizations acquire the aura of sacredness, morality, and necessity. They reduce persons to the status of the inert. Thus, the artificial ego of the collectivity supplants the ego of the individual. The socially constructed artificial ego of the collectivity becomes the subject, while the persons become objects. The inclinations and preferences of individuals are conflated into a "social will" that trumps and suppresses the self and the intentionality of the person. While this process occurs differently in each "composite," the organization reflects the will of some "master minds" and suppresses the will of particular individuals who are also members of the groups.<sup>24</sup> In each case, the war against the egoism of individuals is a scheme to establish and maintain a hierarchy in a social organization.

Walker challenges the critics of egoism, particularly in religion and government, to find a deity or politician who is not an "egoistic autocrat." Is there a god who has worshippers who do not bow down because it is prudent to submit? Is there a family that sacrifices itself to the individuals and does not sacrifice the aspirations of individuals to itself? Is there a government that departs from a need to defend itself and the tendency toward self-aggrandizement in order to sacrifice for its subjects? Is there any form of collective humanity that does not enshroud itself in a cloak of moral and intellectual superiority over its particulars? Is there any "composite individuality" that refuses to suppress individual freedom for its benefit? Walker's point is that egoism is a fact that exists on the level of individuals and groups. The question, which is to prevail, the egoism of the artificial composite or the egoism of individuals? "We are trying to explain that egoism is the chief fact of organic existence—its universal characteristic."<sup>25</sup> The philosophic and political problem that the "egoistic anarchists" confront is how to challenge the ability of collectivities to suppress the egoism of individuals. Egoism has a political purpose and political content; it is a philosophy of individual behavior and social organization that undermines the hierarchies of groups and social institutions by stripping away the lofty ideals of the masters and revealing their egoistic motives of self-preservation and self-aggrandizement.

## **EGOISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT**

Unlike Nietzsche and Rand, the chief ideological nemesis of egoism in Walker's thought is not altruism, but "moralism." Walker argues that

some forms of altruism are actually phases of egoist behavior. Altruism is a category of behaviors that can be explained by and reconciled with egoism.<sup>26</sup> Walker conceives of altruism as behavior that is "regardful of others; proud of or devoted to others." It does not necessarily include self-sacrifice, and may contribute to the acting person's well-being. Walker says, "To be regardful of others within reason, is intelligent egoism in the first place," but it must not become a fixed idea, expressing or leading to self-sacrifice, worship, mental slavery, superstition, or any other form of antiegoist thought.<sup>27</sup> Like egoism, altruism is a fact of life. The behavior of persons is frequently motivated by an interest or regard for others. Altruistic thoughts and behaviors are usually an expression of egoism in that they are thought to satisfy some interest or provide some pleasure or gratification to the actor. Walker believes in a form of psychological egoism, acknowledging that human behavior is generally motivated by the interests of the self, but this is not absolute. Frequently, the normal and natural egoism of individuals is eclipsed by social and cultural forces that encourage or require persons to become other-oriented or to surrender the self to others. The problem with altruism, or other-regarding behavior, is that organizational elites tend to convert it into self-sacrifice, to motivate individuals through "duty," or a sense of a fictitious, abstract ideal of "justice" in interpersonal relations, which is enforced internally through "conscience."<sup>28</sup>

When altruism is divorced from a solid grounding in the choices and convictions of the person, it is a form of alienation from the self that undermines the person's ability to survive, prosper, and appropriate life. Moralism is the alienated form of altruism. Culturally and psychologically, the alienated expression of altruism is encapsulated in the concepts of "duty" and "justice." Taken together, these notions suggest that the person owes or ought to behave in a designated manner in order to fulfill an abstract ideal of justice. Some duties the individual ego assumes voluntarily in response to "duties assumed by others toward me." For Walker, this is the reciprocity that appears in Stirner's union of egoists. It is not alienated behavior, and it does not contradict Walker's notion of egoism since it amounts to nothing more than voluntary exchange. Walker uses the notion of contract labor as an example. A person is employed to do certain work for pay, services are exchanged for money or some form of desiderata. A debt appears on one side, then on the other, and the account is eventually balanced as a mutually advantageous exchange, or contractual relationship. Contracts impose reciprocal obligations but they are not a form of duty since it is a voluntary agreement. However, other expressions of duty are fixed in culture, propagated by moral authorities, that persons "ought" to acknowledge and fulfill out of a sense of right, conscience, and justice. This form of duty is often coerced

through physical force or the threat of it. This is a form of compulsory service or duty.

"Moralism" promotes the notion that the obligations of persons to society and the state, are fixed in culture, not negotiated among persons in everyday life, and that their fulfillment must be coerced through some form of physical force or psychological threat, not left to the vagaries of individual choice. From the point of view of the individual, duty is the surrender of one's thought and mind to the fixed ideas of culture, society, and the state, usually as these are interpreted by moral authorities. For Walker, this form of duty is different from the expectations persons place on themselves and each other as they exchange in everyday life; it is a form of mental slavery. "Duty is what is due. The domination of a fixed idea begins when one admits something due and yet not due to any person or something due without benefit coming to one in return."<sup>29</sup>

Walker did not develop the "slaves to duty" metaphor. Walker's notion that duty is a form of slavery was developed more thoroughly by the British egoist John Badcock Jr. in a speech he delivered in London that was later published as an egoist pamphlet. Badcock was likely influenced by Walker, but the evidence that he lifted the metaphor to use in his speech, "Slaves to Duty," is not clear. Badcock's speech was delivered in 1894, three years after Walker published the essay that used the metaphor. For Badcock, the most pernicious form of duty occurs in politics.

From the belief that the levying of taxes and conscription is right and proper follows the belief that it is the duty of the subject to pay the taxes and fight in obedience to command. If you grant the right to command to anybody or anything, be it the king, parliament, church, or conscience, you as a natural consequence inflict the duty of obedience on those who are subject to the commander.<sup>30</sup>

Political duty is usually expressed as allegiance to a government or a political ideology, but its consequences are more far-reaching for the individual since duty "prevents me from judging correctly as to where my self-interest lies." Duty is a form of voluntary servitude that ensnares and prevents the individual from acting on his or her own behalf. Further, it leaves the individual open to unreasonable and destructive demands from institutions and organizations. For individuals, the only escape from bondage is to deny all duties and look to their self-interest as the most appropriate guide for behavior.

"Justice" is the second pillar of moralism that Walker describes. Like duty, justice is a concept intended to help elites in social institutions manage the relationships among individuals. Furthermore, although individuals have a sense of "justice" and "injustice," and although groups frequently build a theory of justice that promotes the satisfaction of their demands on

others, the application of justice to any concrete circumstance is the exclusive right and responsibility of the state and its legal system. The notion that there is any ideal form of society or relations among persons that realizes "justice" is a fiction. Absent an "adjustment of social relations" in which each person "is alive to his own interests and convenience," justice can only be "the war cry of quixotic campaigns" that succeed in reducing "ignorant, helpless folk" to the tools of fanatics and speculators. The argument that any individual might acquire justice for self is abhorrent to moralists of all types since it implies that the judge, jury, and executioner is not society, but the person. Historically, philosophically, and ethically, "justice" is a favor of society and the state. Operationally, it is an artifact of the complex mechanisms of the legal system. The authority and dignity of the legal mechanism, therefore, must be protected at all costs from challenges that suggest that its operation is unjust.

The egoist cannot worship or respect the "justice" of moralists and statists. Only those who free themselves are free and only those who assert themselves and struggle for justice can achieve it. Only these people can or will acquire justice for themselves, although the state works to prevent them and their associates from doing so. Egoism acknowledges the contradiction in the principle that justice is a gift or donation from society. Those with authority to dispense justice in society are analogous to "the shepherd who manages his flock, not for the sake of the flock, but for his interest in it." Egoists aspire to the accommodation or negotiation of interests and exchanges according to the abilities, resources, and expectations of contracting parties. Absent the invasion of the legal system into the voluntary relationships among individuals, egoists pursue and value their exchanges, contracts, and alliances with others who are not afflicted with superstitions about the fairness or propriety in the favors society and the state confer. Like Stirner, Walker is not so naïve that he believes that all egoist interactions will be consensual and perceived as mutually beneficial. Egoists are responsible for "protecting ourselves and serving our convenience." Conflict and antagonism will continue to be a feature of social life. Therefore, egoists are willing to use force against dangerous or predatory individuals, and will not let an offender off on technicalities if they think it is necessary to expel or kill him. The egoist expects neither absolute harmony nor balance in the relationships among persons. The egoist seeks the opportunity to configure his or her life and relationship without the external mediation of social institutions that intend to prescribe their thoughts and actions. For the egoist, the rhetoric and administration of justice are not helpful.

Let us beware of the craze for justice. It is the mask of social tyranny. It demands a delegated authority and a prerogative in this authority. Thus it

builds a citadel of injustice; so that the man who does himself justice is declared by the law to be guilty of a crime against it, the monopoly of the administration of justice.<sup>31</sup>

Moralists tend to convert “admirable actions” or “acts of beneficence” into duties and manifestations of justice. Walker argues that all forms of generosity, magnanimity, and benevolence are rooted in the “wise schemes of reciprocal duties” spontaneously created by individuals in everyday life. Reciprocity and generosity are not the negation of egoism, but expressions of it. “Generosity is the overflowing fullness of a successful, satisfied and hopeful individuality.”<sup>32</sup> For organizational elites, generosity, reciprocity, and justice cannot be left to the indeterminacy of persons interacting with each other in everyday life. Moralism is a system of thought based on the idea that the behavior of persons needs to be coerced internally through a sense of duty or necessity in order to meet the requirements of justice. It is an ideological or cultural form of social control since the behaviors of persons are prefigured, as far as possible, through articulated patterns that acquire formal and informal social sanctions to ensure compliance. It complements direct or political forms of control that rely on physical force to ensure compliance.

The most potent ensemble of sanctions, however, are those successfully planted in the mind of the person that constitute a practical philosophy of right, structuring the person’s behavior on an everyday basis. Through culture and the socialization process, moralism creates an internal system of surveillance and control that warns the person against breaking the sacred rules of morality, culture, and society. It admonishes against offending god, society, and the state. It establishes what is “good” and what is “evil.” The internal mechanism operationalizing the dictates of the horizontal control is the conscience, which to the egoist is nothing more than the dread, fear, and self-reproach that accompanies a person’s violation of social norms. The conscience is something different from the fear of punishment or a calculation of consequences of being discovered a deviant. It can intervene in the trajectory of the person’s behavior before or after an act has occurred.

The conscience, the third pillar of moralism, is the primary weapon of the moralist against egoism. There is nothing mystical or supernal about it; conscience is the result of education, indoctrination, and socialization that produces a nebulous, but integrated sense of dread at the violation of societal rules. Walker argues that every religion has commandments that may seem absurd to external observers, but they still manage to acquire the status of sacred, absolute rules in the conscience of the believer. The conscience ensures observance of the commandments and reinforces their absoluteness by internally repressing dissent and challenge to them. The



conscience acquires form and content not only through religion, but through any social institution that creates and conveys strictures on behavior, including the family, the school, the factory, and the state. The conscience operationalizes moralism because it is the result of the internalization of external standards of duty and justice. For the egoist, the conscience is a superstition, an artificial creation that utilizes sentiment and reflection to interpret our voluntary actions according to an external standard of duty and justice. The egoist does not judge self by reference to any external standard, but can only express satisfaction or regret at his or her actions. The notion of a conscience is anathema to the egoist because it is only an internal repository of the reified, fixed ideas the egoist intends to destroy. The practical and political intent of egoism is to expunge the conscience as a whole, undermine the ideologies and institutions that create and enforce external standards of behavior, and “outgrow the habitual sway” of external strictures on behavior.

### MODERNITY AND THE POLITICS OF EGOISM

Although Walker and Tucker had a respectful professional relationship and viewed ethical issues similarly, there were significant differences between the two regarding the foundations of political and economic life. Both considered themselves egoistic or individualistic anarchists. Both considered themselves to be pro-labor and anti-capital. Both were advocates of free competition and private property. Unlike Tucker, Walker was a thorough, consistent opponent of natural right philosophy and he was highly critical of the notion of equal liberty as antithetical to the intellectual foundation of egoism and, hence, anarchism. Walker assailed the notion of right not only in *The Philosophy of Egoism*, but in several articles, letters, and rejoinders published in *Liberty*. Tucker was not among his frequent antagonists.

Walker frequently had lengthy exchanges on the notion of rights with John F. and Gertrude B. Kelly, both of whom wrote independently in *Liberty*. The Kellys advocated for an individualist anarchism grounded in a natural rights philosophy that was unapologetic about promoting equal liberty to all humans by virtue of the fact that they are humans. The Kellys repeatedly attacked Walker for his refusal to acknowledge that the internal enforcement of moral codes through the individual's conscience was essential to maintaining social order. Anarchism, to be successful, needed to demonstrate that it was superior to other political ideologies because it offered both individual liberty and social order. The methodology of anarchist thought was to destroy the state so that individuals could genuinely discover the laws of nature governing human interaction and,

thereby, synchronize their thoughts and behaviors with others, reducing conflict and maximizing cooperation. The key to human liberty is to discover natural law and conform with its strictures. The rights of individuals are established in nature and are revealed as persons are freed from domination of the state and able to discover natural law. Natural law and natural right were essential to freedom and order. In the absence of natural law and natural right, morality was impossible and humans were free to visit all sorts of abuse on their fellows.<sup>33</sup>

By the time the debates over natural rights with the Kellys began in 1887, Walker had read Stirner and was eager to share his egoistic critiques of morality, natural law, and natural rights with the individualist anarchists associated with *Liberty*. In several exchanges with the Kellys, Walker argues that the notions of natural law and natural right were only “spooks” that had no referent in the world humans inhabit. If they did exist, natural laws and natural rights are silent and inert. They do not speak to everyone. They do not speak to anyone. Like theology, natural right philosophy is dependent upon a small group of technical specialists who claim to speak for nature, elaborating the content of law and right that should structure the thoughts, values, and behaviors of persons. Someone always has to speak for the laws and rights that are thought to be grounded in nature. What qualifies a person to speak for nature with any authority? Why are the Kellys and their philosophic companions qualified to define the laws and rights of nature? Why should they be taken as the ultimate arbiters of natural law and natural right and, hence, morality?

The advocates of natural right are quick to point to the importance of morality in human relationships, but they have not succeeded in establishing why the dictates of morality should override the thoughts, goals, agreements that persons establish in everyday life. The philosophy of natural right, despite the pretense that it will free persons as part of the anarchist rebellion, is in reality a form of “moralism” that only recreates political domination in a new form, once again appealing to duty, conscience, and justice to ensure that individuals do not develop ideas or assert their power in ways that conflict with morality and the laws of nature. Ultimately, natural law, natural right, and morality are antithetical to the sovereignty of the individual.

Egoism initially promotes not external liberty, but internal liberty since it shatters duty, justice, and conscience as internal, ideological mechanisms of social control. The egoist assault on internal social control engenders a type of equal liberty of egoists since it creates a common foundation for the appropriation and use of property and power. This is quite unlike all political philosophies that are based on a moralist view of human life. Democracy and aristocracy, for example, are based on the commonality of birthright. In democratic theory, participation in the political process and individual lib-

erty are the “sacred birthright” of each individual. In theory, individuals do not have to earn or assert rights; these are conferred on the individual by God, nature, or the state by virtue of the person’s humanity. Of course, the actual practice of democracies frequently contradicts the theory or the ideal, but democracies pride themselves on eliminating political, social, and cultural barriers to full and equal participation in the political process. As Walker says, the passport of the individual into a democracy “is his humanity, not his personal assertion and demonstration of his power and will to command equal liberty.”<sup>34</sup> Aristocracy, likewise, is a political philosophy founded on birthright since liberty and privilege are the right of a special class; they are not conferred on all, which distinguishes aristocracy from democracy. The problem with Tucker’s notion of equal liberty is that it is also founded in natural right. It is a promise, a gift, a conferral, a birthright, an artifact that is not dependent upon the person’s effort, achievement, assertion, or even interest. Its value is established externally, apart from the subjectivity of the individual ego, or the person’s active assignment of meaning and value to it.

The egoist understands equal liberty as an outcome of the rejection of “old beliefs and indoctrination” which enables individuals to appreciate and assert their powers as individuals. “When each of us has determined to be as free as he can, to yield only to effective force in restraint of the liberty he wills to exercise, there will be more liberty and substantially equal liberty for us if we be numerous, even while far from a majority.” Tucker’s concept of equal liberty entails the notion that humanity is sacred, that humans are to be respected only for their humanity. Egoism rejects this notion and bases the claim to equal liberty among egoists on being an individual “who can be known to be neither a tyrant whom they must combat nor slave incapable of requiting their aid.”<sup>35</sup>

Tucker’s definition of anarchists as “unterrified Jeffersonian democrats,” clearly expresses the democratic commandment to establish and guard an equal status for all. Among the anarchists, democrats, socialists, and humanists, the guardianship of equality is a religion that impedes individual conviction, aspiration, and achievement. The democratic, socialist, communist, and anarchist revolutionaries believe that they abolish class domination once they destroy aristocratic and capitalist privileges. The reality is they merely reduce all to the status of plebeians before the “composite individuality” of the state. They recreate an aristocracy of those who make and enforce the law. Equal liberty remains a chimera because neither liberty nor equality can be established objectively through the coercion of the “composite individuality.” Instead, efforts by the “composite individuality” to establish liberty and equality as objective facts produces nothing but yokes that bind the egoist and nonegoist alike to minimal aspirations, expectations, abilities, and achievements.

Liberty must be divorced from equality. Liberty is impossible without the understanding that each person discovers or reveals his or her own directives through choice and conviction. Society is the field where individuals discover, reveal, and attempt to enforce their will and convictions on those who come into their domain. While equality can be imposed on individuals and society through the coercive reduction of all to the lowest common level, liberty cannot. Liberty can only be chosen. In a social context, liberty is not a right bestowed by an external power, but the assertion of will and conviction by individuals. It can be expressed in the exchange of power, recognition, and aid that egoistic allies provide each other.

Your right and liberty, apart from what you can do for yourself, is that part of your will and pleasure which receives the support of allies lending you the aid of their power, as their right and liberty has the same extension by recognition and aid from you and others.<sup>36</sup>

Egoists are not revolutionaries, although they seek a transformation of human relations. They do not seek the emancipation of a "herd of human cattle," or those who are uninterested or unwilling to reveal their own convictions and assert their own power. They are interested in collaborating with persons who are interested and capable of "asserting all attainable liberty." Despite the derogatory label, egoists do not despise the "herd" but call it what it is. In fact, all egoists arise from the herd. Thus, the herd contains "my precious" potential allies. Those who develop as egoists, Walker will recognize, esteem, and support in equal liberty because the life of the egoist is better with allies than without them.

Differentiating Stirner's egoism from Nietzsche's, Walker asserts that egoists do not revere nor do they wait for the *Übermensch*. They are the *Übermenschen*. Unlike Nietzsche, the egoists oppose aristocracies because of the assignment of individuals to social classes based on birthright. An egoist may derive some pleasure in asserting power and associating with bold colleagues, but despises hereditary systems that force parents to transmit power and wealth to one child, but consign other children to inferior positions. Nietzsche pretends that the master morality valued in aristocratic social systems transcends the slave morality of Christianity, democracy, and humanism. But aristocracy is just another form of moralism because it, too, is based on a set of preexisting rules that enforce obedience and deprive persons of the ability to establish the rules they live by. Moralism in all its forms procures subjects who establish their virtue through obedience to the commands and rules of the specific regime. Moralism attempts to establish a course for human thought and behavior which purports to provide both virtue and happiness, social order and individual fulfillment, community and individuality. The egoist resists moralism because virtue and individual happiness tend to be opposites.

Their conflation is only for the credulous. In modernity, moralism aspires to the perfection of the human, it veers away from individuality and the extant person. Persons are encouraged or required to “find themselves” in the essence or general idea of the species, the proletarian, the citizen, the master, or the human.<sup>37</sup>

The notion of perfection or perfectibility prompts conformity to presumed exemplary characteristics in others. Perfection and perfectibility are founded on essences or ideal types, and not what is otherwise in persons “genuinely.” Following Stirner, Walker reports that regimes may succeed in setting up the “true or perfect man,” but individuals are more than what any regime sets up as an ideal. Each is unique. The uniqueness of individuals cannot be established or known prior to experience with them. It cannot be captured in an essence or an ideal type. Egoism is what persons think, feel, and act out themselves outside of, or in opposition to, ideal types created by social systems or political regimes. The aim of egoism is not to establish ideal men or women but to free them from “any yoke or assigned task, in order to normally possess, enjoy, develop and exhibit himself or herself.”<sup>38</sup> The moment that persons know themselves to be true, perfect, genuine, and natural is the moment that they are set free to work out their convictions, values, interests, and goals. The reference to the unique one or the individual ego is not a reference to an essence or an ideal type; is the only the point of departure. The discovery and revelation of self is the methodology of egoism. Thus, the reshaping of individuals to fit political abstractions such as “the democratic citizen,” “the ideal woman,” or “the socialist man” are futile and destructive.

Persons appropriate from the species what they find interesting and useful, but they have no obligation to fulfill any ideal type. They have no religious, social, or historical purpose other than what they assign themselves. Unlike Tucker, Spooner, and the individualist anarchists who based their political theory on natural right, Walker does not view anarchism as a political goal or an ideal political system. Anarchism is the result of the state imploding because it has been abandoned by a critical mass of egoists who organize their lives without it. The egoism of Walker and Stirner is not a form of anarchism and it cannot be easily classified into any philosophic taxonomy. It is a practice-oriented philosophy of living for individuals who seek to discover and reveal who they are.

You, as a person of flesh and blood, will not be successfully classified in “philosophy,” I think, if you grasp the idea and act on it. The old so-called philosophic egoism was a disquisition on the common characteristics of men, a sort of generality. The real living egoism is the fact of untrammelled mind in this or that person and the actions resulting, the end of the tyranny of general ideas.<sup>39</sup>

### PROPERTY AND POWER: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EGOISM

Like many of Tucker's associates, Walker also wrote and published commentary on the economic issues debated in *Liberty*. Walker concurred with Stirner and other egoist writers at the end of the nineteenth century that economic and political facts were ultimately inseparable, and that the unique one's appropriation and use of property and power were significant expressions of ownness. Walker was also very concerned about the nature of the self-other relationship. He was interested in political-economic issues because of the potential for interpersonal exploitation. Despite points of agreement with Tucker, Walker's primary interest was in working out an egoist perspective. Consequently, he took positions on economic issues that occasionally put him at odds with Tucker and the individualist anarchists. Tucker and his colleagues used the concept of equal liberty as the standard for their approach to economic issues. Walker largely objected to the imposition of equal liberty as an absolute standard. Walker was generally more interested in the acquisition and use of power and property, and its implications for self and others. For instance, Tucker was careful to articulate interest as part of the trinity of usury, arguing that interest was a mechanism that finance capitalists used to exploit workers, craftsmen, and farmers. For Tucker, labor is the source of economic value, and cost is the limit of price. Interest, therefore, is unearned surplus value that enables finance capitalists to prosper at the expense of the lower social classes. In Tucker's concept of "free competition," interest would be a thing of the past.

In 1891, Walker wrote a rebuttal to this notion that was published in the journal *Egoism* and was later reprinted in *Liberty*.<sup>40</sup> Walker argues that the belief that interest is a form of usury is based on "sentiment" and is an "incomplete" analysis. Based on the laissez-faire principles of egoism, the person or firm that has money to lend is entitled to earn more than any amount loaned, if others are voluntarily willing to pay for the use of the money. The individualist anarchist argument that interest is usury is only a pretense, or an a priori stricture that the lender is not entitled to earn more or to possess more than she or he already has. The argument that interest is usury is merely a socialist strategy for redistributing wealth that invades free commerce and the voluntary exchanges among individuals. For Walker, lending is a form of exchange. Borrowers need a scarce resource for their use, and cannot pay lender in full because of the scarcity of money. Borrowers are able to use money under the condition that the lender has the potential to recover the balance due if she or he can wait for a specified period of time. Interest is nothing more than the return, agreed to by the parties, due the lender for the time that his or her money was being used by someone else.

The labor theory of value and its corollary, cost is the limit of price, are fixed ideas that intrude upon the free choices of the lender and the borrower. The lender who seeks interest is accused of "appropriating from among the borrower's goods a sum that he will have done nothing to earn." Walker objects that the borrower is not a victim, but a free agent who can reason and determine whether the exchange is appropriate. The individualist anarchist argument against interest implies that the lender and the borrower need the intervention by an external agent to ensure that the exchange is fair, just, and appropriate. The borrower particularly needs the help of an external agent to ensure that his or her rights are protected. The egoist believes that the lender and borrower should determine that. If there is a need for an external agent, this should be a warning to both borrower and lender.

Walker argues that it is important to assess interest in terms of the existing realities of currency and labor, as opposed to the fictional world of labor notes concocted by the individualist anarchists. The idea behind the labor note, of course, is that currency should be based on the time that individuals work. But this is not how persons are paid in the real world since labor is not the only source of value represented in currency. The lender who is able to accumulate money to lend through "economy and self-denial" inevitably has earned more than she or he can lend. The lender's accumulated are earned disadvantageously because of exploitation, taxation, and the lack of a free currency. The currency accumulated by the lender is "scarce, interest-commanding money, a very different thing" from an equal amount in "free currency that would represent only labor value and that value fully paid up at the time." Thus, the privilege or advantage attributed to the lender is exaggerated by the individualist anarchist analysis. The risks and difficulties experienced by the lender are ignored.

The exchange between the lender and the borrower is not a simple form of exploitation as the individualist anarchists present it. It is not completely clear who actually pays the interest, or how the value represented by the interest is actually generated. The individualist anarchists want to believe that the exchange between borrower and lender is a closed system in which the lender benefits and the borrower suffers. But this ignores the reality that lending and borrowing adds to the "general stock of wealth." That is, lending helps create new economic value, which benefits the borrower and makes the payment of interest possible.

The fact that the borrower pays the interest and has more left than he would have if the loan had been refused, may be deemed proof that the interest does not come out of the borrower's goods. It comes out of the general stock of wealth through the borrower.<sup>41</sup>

The individualist anarchist critique suggests that borrowers would be better off if they did not have to pay interest. But this is a strange argument if borrowers are better off, more prosperous, better able to compete, because of the exchange. The argument that interest is exploitation because the borrower is not compensated for services in the exchange is laughable. Borrowers who could get money without interest would enjoy a competitive advantage over those who have to pay interest and would accumulate more profit. It is ridiculous to attack "free competition" or voluntary exchanges in the use of money because it produces profit. Both lender and borrower want to profit by the exchange. If lenders take the critique of interest seriously, and refuse to lend money because of scruples associated with the "cost is the limit of price" stricture, the effect will be less currency available to borrow, higher interest rates, lower pay, higher unemployment, and less opportunity for workers, craftsmen, and farmers to start or expand businesses. The "total stock" of wealth will be smaller than if lenders are encouraged to put their money into circulation.

For the egoist, it is critical that individuals are able to exchange goods, services, and currency without the external direction by either political elites or fixed ideas. Walker objects to the imposition of formulae, such as the labor note and the dictum "cost is the limit of price," on the interactions and exchanges of individuals. He believes that reciprocity emerges from interactions and exchanges; it cannot be imposed on them. For the same reason, he also objects to (a) the creation of a national bank, (b) arguments that justify the government's creation of a monopoly on currency, and (c) legislative efforts to protect the public from monopolies or failures in markets. Debates on these issues appeared in *Liberty* throughout its life and certainly predated the creation of the Federal Reserve and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

In 1891 and 1893, Walker wrote articles for *Liberty* that attacked the Sherman Antitrust Act and governmental efforts to regulate banking. In "A Century of Fraud" and "Monopoly's Devious Ways," Walker ridicules the idea that the government can effectively prevent banking failures or protect the public from "unsafe banking practices."<sup>42</sup> In Walker's view, the banking failures of the time were due to mismanagement, such as "allowing borrowers to have quantities of paper money far exceeding the value of the security pledged." These failures did not reflect on the notion of the "free bank" independent of governmental control. He strongly objected to legislation by the Rhode Island General Assembly that required persons to accept paper bills as payment for goods on the same terms as gold. Those who refused or who discouraged the circulation of paper bills were to be fined and imprisoned. The value of currency cannot be legitimately established by governmental fiat; it can only be established by what people will accept as possessing "debt-paying power." The only legitimate



currency is that which has value “by consent,” not by governmental decree. The governmental regulation of banking and currency was an unwarranted social control device that tended to cause more harm than good because it served only as the “political agent for the money kings.”

Walker devoted the largest share of his writing on economic issues to the debates on intellectual property, particularly copyright law. McElroy reports that a debate on intellectual property was likely inevitable because of contradictory strands of thought within the individualist anarchist community. During the winter and spring of 1891, Walker published four articles in *Liberty* that outlined his egoistic view of copyright and property. Walker’s essays on copyright in *Liberty* were prepared as part of a broad debate on intellectual property that took place between July 1888 and July 1891.<sup>43</sup>

Two important precursors of Tucker’s individualist anarchism had taken strong stands in favor of the individual’s right to perpetual ownership of their ideas. Lysander Spooner published a book in 1855 titled, *Law of Intellectual Property or an Essay on the Right of Authors and Inventors to a Perpetual Property in Their Ideas*, which argued that individuals have a natural right to all products of their labor, including their ideas.

A man’s ideas are his property. They are his for enjoyment, and his for use. Other men do not own his ideas. He has a right, as against all other men, to absolute dominion over his ideas. He has a right to act his own judgment, and his own pleasure, is to giving them, or selling them to other men. Other men cannot claim them of him, as if they were their property, and not his; any more than they can claim any other things whatever, that are his. If they desire them, and he does not give them gratuitously, they must buy them as they would buy other articles of property. They must pay him his price for them, or not have them. They have no more right to force him to give his ideas to them, than they in trying to force him to give them his purse.<sup>44</sup>

Herbert Spencer, also a highly respected intellectual precursor of Tucker and the *Liberty* associates, developed a similar notion about intellectual property in his *Principles of Ethics*. Spencer argues that persons have a right to the “incorporeal property” that results from their “constructive imagination.”<sup>45</sup> Tucker, who was greatly influenced by both Spooner and Spencer on other issues, initiated the debate on intellectual property in the July 7, 1888, issue of *Liberty* arguing that, contrary to Spooner and Spencer, there cannot be a right to an exclusive ownership of an idea.<sup>46</sup> Tucker was joined by Walker in advocating against intellectual property rights, and he was opposed by the Spencerian sociologist Victor Yarros who argued in favor of intellectual property rights.

Walker opposed all intellectual property law as “another name for prohibition” since it prohibits the exercise of individual motivation and labor.

He argues that copyright and intellectual property law “are derived from a political condition in which the sovereign prohibited intellectual activities in general and then relaxed the prohibition in favor of certain persons.”<sup>47</sup> As an egoist, Walker had a slightly different take on the issue than either Tucker or Yarros. Walker claims no respect for any form of property rights, including those associated with intellectual property, as the absolute right of the creator, author, or inventor. However, he is “disposed” to “allow others the possession the products of their labor if they will allow mine to me.” Egoism encourages a contractual relationship which allows others to own the products of their labor, but also the material they work with and all material that embodies their labor. The claim to ownership of intellectual property is a different matter altogether since it pertains to ideas.

The ability of all workers to compete, survive, and prosper is limited by the nature of the materials they work with and the ease or difficulty with which their production can be transferred for sale. Intellectual property law confers privileges on authors and inventors because it prohibits competitors from embodying the product in other materials. It confers a privilege since the property is protected while the owner “awaits” transfer of the idea to new or other materials. If all authors and inventors had asserted their “rights” in copyright and patent “from the beginning of civilization,” commerce and social interaction would come to a standstill since each user would have to pay royalties on the wheel, the axe, the alphabet, and mathematics.<sup>48</sup> Because the production and transfer of ideas is infinite, there would be no end to the assertion of rights, prohibitions, and remuneration due for the use of human products and artifacts.

Walker says that the main problem posed by intellectual rights is that they create and impose a form of monopoly that prohibits the individual from using resources to earn a living or share ideas with others. Certainly, ideas differ from other outcomes of human labor because they are intangible and because they can be “owned” in Stirner’s sense by anyone who comprehends them. For Walker, the issue is not so much a matter of protecting property from the point of view of individual possession and use, but that it legitimates a societal invasion of individual behavior. Intellectual property rights constitute an assertion of collective or state power over the mind and intent of persons who understand and intend to use the ideas.

My thoughts are my property as the air in my lungs is my property. When I publish my ideas, they become the property of as many persons as comprehend them. If any person wishes to live by imparting his ideas in exchange for labor, I have nothing to say against his doing so and getting cooperative protection without invading the persons and property of myself and my allies. We will take care, if we can, that he and his party do not invade our homes, stop our printing presses and seize our books.<sup>49</sup>

In some respects, the labor of authors and inventors is no different from other persons. If labor results in a product, the product can be sold and transferred. Authors and inventors are free to all the property they can create and protect without government, but they are not free to prevent others from using ideas as others deem prudent, convenient, and beneficial. Once ideas are transferred to some form of media, sold, and become the possessions of others, authors and inventors cannot prevent them from doing what they choose. On the other hand, authors and inventors can control the use of their products through some form of contract, cooperation, or boycott. This what is meant by “equal liberty,” the concept cherished by Spooner, Tucker, Spencer, and Yarros. Walker was critical of equal liberty, but, in this debate, he invokes it to demonstrate that it differs from “equal prohibition.”

The egoists and individualist anarchists believed in property, unlike socialists and communists. They needed to provide their own answer to the question, “what is property?” because it implies much about the nature of the relationship between the self and other, and the individual and the state. “Exclusive rights” and “perpetual property” legitimate the claims of authors and publishers, inventors and manufacturers who intend to use the coercive power of the state to establish a monopoly over the exchange and use of the “past labor” of authors and inventors. For Walker, rights and compensation associated with past labor are ludicrous claims that privileged persons can make against others in perpetuity. These claims for ownership and compensation are tantamount to the claims that workers should be compensated for past work, or that writers should be compensated for not writing. Most significantly, the claim to intellectual property rights is a claim for the ownership of the productivity of other people who intend to make use of ideas. Unlike the products that an individual or firm produces with the intent to either use or sell to others, the intellectual property rights of authors and inventors are not a forms of property that egoists and individualist anarchists can accept if the ideas have been communicated or otherwise exchanged, and if others intend to make use of them. The concerns of authors and inventors regarding compensation and plagiarism can be addressed through contract, but egoism rejects the assertion of right especially when it extends into the mind and intentionality of the individual.

Stirner’s discussion of economics in *The Ego and Its Own* is a grand narrative focused on class conflict and the critique of departures from the ideology of “free competition.” Stirner was especially critical of theories that purported to offer a break from capitalism but only created new forms of deprivation. Proudhon was one of Stirner’s primary targets. Walker was particularly critical of finance capitalism and the privileges attendant with intellectual property rights. Although he addressed a dif-

ferent set of issues, Walker advanced Stirner's critique of modern economics in the sense that he used ownness or egoism as the standpoint for a critique of the exploitation or dispossession of individuals. Walker's primary contribution to egoist economics is that he extended Stirner's notion that property and value are derived from the concessions that persons are able to acquire in the contracts created in the union of egoists, or the reciprocal exchange in the self-other relationship.

### RECIPROCALITY AND PREDATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In many respects, Walker's egoism is a restatement of Stirner's main arguments written for a fin de siècle Anglo-American audience. Walker's writings on egoism do not express either the breadth or depth Stirner presents in *The Ego and Its Own*, but they have a focus that fits within the range of issues discussed in *Liberty* and the smaller journals that published Walker's work. These include the critique of right and duty, the inclusion of ideas about "ownness," and the potential for reciprocity in the union of egoists. Walker does not discuss the totality of modernist thought Stirner mapped out; instead, he aims at Christianity, Christian morality, and the political institutions in Great Britain and America, counterposing egoism as a philosophy of liberation against these forms of control and coercion. Also unlike Stirner, Walker understands egoism as "the solid base of anarchism and atheism. Though it does not necessarily render each egoist agreeable to all other egoists, it destroys the awe, reverence, and obedience upon which all despotisms thrive."<sup>50</sup> For Walker, egoism is the explicit philosophic foundation for anarchist and atheist thought. It is the basis for the political and cultural agenda of anarchism and atheism. Although it is explicitly anarchist, Walker's egoism is more consistently "Stirnerite" since it expunged the natural rights philosophy that permeated Tucker's notion of equal liberty.

Walker responds to the contradiction in Stirner's concept of the self-other relationship by arguing that reciprocity and authenticity will return to human relationships once egoists have destroyed the "dominion of ideas" or the "tyranny of foreign motives." Reciprocity is found in persons negotiating and contracting with each other. Predation will diminish because egoists will recognize that they have more to gain through contract and cooperation than through violence and intimidation. Just as all altruistic acts are ultimately rooted in egoism, egoistic acts will become altruistic. Predation is best understood as the outcome of interaction with fixed ideas, and as the intrusion of the state, church, or other "composite individualities" into the self-other relationship. Predation exists in society and in the interactions of persons because alienated actions are demanded

by foreign motives and oppressive social institutions. The natural and authentic egoism of persons does not foreshadow interpersonal crime and violence. If given a chance, egoists will be both generous and altruistic because they will find generosity and altruism gratifying. Walker objects to the idea that the dissolution of the state, morality, and duty will provide a breeding ground for criminals. The moralists claim that

The egoist, as an irresponsible, conscienceless criminal, is the coming force, who will destroy all existing institutions. Mark what is called criminal. It is always some action which is the retort to the egoistic pretension of a man or of an institution. It will make a great difference when many egoists become fully self-consciousness and not ashamed of being conscienceless egoists.<sup>51</sup>

The egoist is not born but arises out of the "herd" from a choice he or she makes to understand the "genuine" source of motives: the self. How does one of the herd become an egoist? Walker does not tell us how this occurs, or what differentiates those who make this choice from those who do not. Nor does he tell us much about the nature of the "herd." Apparently, it is an undifferentiated mass, distinguished from the "composite individualities" that characterize organizations and institutions. Is it thoughtless, mindless, or inferior? How does the other, the egoist's partner, relate to the herd? Is the other person also thoughtless, mindless, or inferior? Why is the egoist, who rose above the herd, expected to be generous and altruistic to a thoughtless, mindless, inferior other? Like Stirner, Walker wants to move beyond all concepts of duties, rights, and equal liberty, but he also wants to salvage generosity, reciprocity, and altruism for reasons that are not altogether clear. The egoist, who genuinely understands that choices and behaviors are rooted in self-interest and value assigned by the self, can also conclude that generosity, reciprocity, and altruism are contrary to self-interest and individual value.

Like Tucker, Walker developed his version of egoist thought in the context of a larger social movement of anarchist, atheist, and individualistic intellectuals and artists that was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with modernity and the movements that postured themselves as alternatives to it. The tension within this movement was expressed in a commitment to eradicate the political and cultural boundaries to individual freedom that was matched with a fear that the destruction of the state and culture would only recreate domination and exploitation at the level of everyday life. How can egoist thought move beyond the resurrection of the war of each against all? Stirner acknowledged the problem by holding open the possibility of the union of egoists, but he failed to theorize about it. Tucker sought a tortured resolution to the problem in equal liberty, concluding that the source of all right is found in the social contract. Walker rejected equal liberty as a spook, but wanted to deal with the problem of social

order through the assumed beneficence of natural, genuine egoism. Walker does not seek equality, but he does seek reciprocity. For Walker, there is no contradiction between individual freedom and the constraints imposed by the self-other relationship once the artificial motives for behavior are eliminated. He optimistically advocates unconstrained individual freedom while wanting to avoid the “war of each against all.” His egoistic anarchism is a return to nature and authenticity, it is a discovery of the natural, genuine self.

Although Tucker and Walker were colleagues, their foci and orientations differed: Tucker was primarily interested in political economy, Walker was primarily interested in how people think about everyday interactions. Their philosophies differed, and so did their interpretation and use of Stirner’s ideas. In the writings of Dora Marsden there is an altogether different interpretation and use of Stirner. Marsden has little regard for notions like reciprocity, altruism, generosity, and equal liberty. She is not particularly interested in reconstructing the self-other relationship in any form. As chapter 6 demonstrates, Marsden presents us with a much more thoroughgoing egoistic critique of modernity than posed by either Tucker or Walker.

## NOTES

1. The egoism of Dora Marsden and her philosophic relationship with Stirner are discussed in chapter 6. Émile Armand was a French individualist anarchist who wrote for the newspaper *l’anarchie* and promoted individualist discussion groups in Paris known as the *Causeries Populaires*, both of which were founded by Albert Libertad. Armand is important in the history of individualist anarchism in part because he helped popularize the concept of *illegalisme*, the notion that since egoist thought undermines obligations to obey the law, it is also a justification for crime and criminality. Although Armand himself did not participate in the anarchist crime spree that occurred in the early twentieth century, he did write in support of the gang of robbers led by Jules Bonnot who claimed to have been influenced by Stirner. John Badcock and John Beverley Robinson both wrote for *Liberty* and both eventually espoused an egoist position on anarchism. Their most important statement on egoism appear in John Badcock, *Slaves to Duty* (1894; Colorado Spring, CO: Ralph Miles, 1972). Robinson’s essay “Egoism” is appended to Badcock’s longer statement. Both essays are available online at <http://nonserviam.com/egoistarchive/index.html> (accessed May 3, 2010).

2. John Henry Mackay, *The Anarchists: A Picture of Civilization at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1891; repr., New York: Autonomedia, 1999); *The Freedomseeker: The Psychology of a Development* (1895; repr., Freiberg: Mackay Gesellschaft, 1983). Mackay’s work on Stirner was extremely important for information about the historical roots of egoist thought. His contributions to egoist theory are probably modest, however. Mackay also has some importance in the history of gay rights.

However, his stature in that movement is tarnished by his advocacy of “man-boy love.” Mackay’s puerile personal interests highlight the fundamental problem with Stirner’s egoist thought: if there are no constraints on the unique ego, what is there to stop or prevent the sexual exploitation of children? Or, what is there to prevent the exploitation and domination of persons generally? Is egoism merely a legitimization for the strong to dominate the weak, for adults to exploit the young? The status of children in society was a particularly difficult topic for individual anarchist and egoist theory in the 1890s and early 1900s. It remains so for contemporary libertarianism. See Wendy McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 69–83 for a discussion of some of the issues pertaining to children as they appeared in *Liberty*.

3. The philosophic relationship between Nietzsche and Stirner is examined in chapter 7. I make no claim here that Nietzsche was influenced by Stirner in any significant degree. I only suggest that interest in Nietzsche also tended to prompt interest in Stirner.

4. Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (1896; repr., New York: Greenwood Press, 1980); Franz Oppenheimer, *The State: Its History and Development Viewed Sociologically* (1908; rep., New York: Free Life, 1975); Roberto Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (1911; repr., Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); and Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society* (1917; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1983).

5. James L. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism* (Denver: Katherine Walker, 1905), 65–66. Available online at [www.nonserviam.com/egoistarchive/walker/walker.html](http://www.nonserviam.com/egoistarchive/walker/walker.html) (accessed May 3, 2010).

6. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 65–66.

7. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 3–7.

8. Henry Replegle, “Biographical,” in Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 70–73.

9. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 67.

10. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 67.

11. Cited in McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 55.

12. Henry Replegle, “Biographical,” in Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 76.

13. Henry Replegle, “Biographical,” in Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 71.

14. Benjamin Tucker, “On Picket Duty,” *Liberty* 14, no. 24:1

15. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 1.

16. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 2.

17. Tak Kak, “What Is Justice?” *Liberty*, March 6, 1886, 8.

18. Tak Kak, “What Is Justice?” 8.

19. Tak Kak, “What Is Justice?” 8.

20. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 2.

21. Tak Kak, “What Is Justice?” 8.

22. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 17–19.

23. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 10; and Tak Kak, “Egoism,” *Liberty*, April 9, 1897, 5.

24. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 10–11.

25. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 16.

26. Walker’s opposition of egoism and moralism suggests the fundamental difference between Stirner and the two more contemporary egoist thinkers, Nietzsche

and Rand. While all three rejected ethics based on altruism or self-sacrifice, Stirner's concept of "ownness" expresses his understanding that the problem is broader than mere opposition to altruism. Walker acknowledged this, although he never added to the notion of ownness. This issue anticipates the content of chapter 7.

27. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 14.

28. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 41. This section of *The Philosophy of Egoism* was one of the original essays that was published in the journal *Egoism* in 1890–1891.

29. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 40.

30. John Badcock, *Slaves to Duty*, 8.

31. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 50.

32. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 42.

33. An example of one of Walker's responses in his exchanges with the Kelly's appears in Tak Kak, "Egoism," *Liberty*, April 9, 1887, 5. Also see Tak Kak, "Egoism or Self-Sacrifice?" *Liberty*, February 13, 1892, 2.

34. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 51.

35. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 51–53.

36. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 52.

37. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 58.

38. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 50–60.

39. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 68.

40. Tak Kak, "Sentimental and Incomplete," *Liberty*, March 7, 1891, 1.

41. Tak Kak, "Sentimental and Incomplete," 1.

42. Tak Kak, "A Century of Fraud," *Liberty*, August 23, 1891, 3.

43. McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty*, 86; Tak Kak, "The Question of Copyright—I," *Liberty*, February 21, 1891, 5; "Copyright—II," *Liberty*, March 7, 1891, 5–6; "Copyright—III," *Liberty*, March 21, 1891, 4–5; and "Copyright—IV," *Liberty*, May 30, 1891, 3–4.

44. Lysander Spooner, *Law of Intellectual Property, or An Essay on the Right of Authors and Inventors to a Perpetual Property in Their Ideas* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1855).

45. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics*, vol. 2 (1897; repr., Indianapolis, IN: The Liberty Fund, 1978).

46. Benjamin Tucker, "Ergo and Presto!" *Liberty*, July 7, 1888, 4.

47. Tak Kak, "Copyright—I," 5.

48. Tak Kak, "Copyright—I," 5.

49. Tak Kak, "Copyright—III," 4.

50. Tak Kak, "Egoism," 6.

51. Tak Kak, "Selfhood Terminates Blind Man's Bluff," *Liberty*, July 3, 1886, 8.







# Beyond Feminism, Beyond Anarchism: Egoism and the Political Thought of Dora Marsden

## DORA MARSDEN: ACTIVIST AND EGOIST

In 1907, Benjamin Tucker moved the offices of *Liberty* to New York expand his publishing enterprise. In January 1908, the New York offices of *Liberty* burned in a fire. The printing presses and the extensive bookstore of anarchist and libertarian literature Tucker assembled were destroyed. Lacking appropriate insurance, and despite the fundraising efforts of his friends and supporters, Tucker could not continue publication of *Liberty* in New York. The last issue of the long-running anarchist periodical was published in April 1908. Tucker soon decided to close down *Liberty* in the United States and move to Europe. He first moved to France with Pearl Johnson, his longtime lover, and daughter Oriole, but he settled in Monaco after the outbreak of World War I, where the family lived in virtual isolation until his death in 1939. Tucker initially intended to publish *Liberty* in Europe soon after his arrival in France, but his plans did not work out and he retired from his life as an editor and prominent radical intellectual.

Tucker was largely unproductive during these years. He became very pessimistic about the possibilities for human liberty and chose to reduce his literary output dramatically.<sup>1</sup> From June 1913 to March 1914, he regularly submitted articles and commentary to *The New Freewoman*, a radical feminist journal which was later renamed *The Egoist* in January 1914. *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist* were published in London and edited by Dora Marsden, a suffragist and feminist activist and writer who eventually espoused a type of egoism that was significantly informed by the writings of Max Stirner. Dora Marsden was editor of three

avant-garde literary journals: *The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review*, *The New Freewoman: An Individualist Review*, and *The Egoist: An Individualist Review*. Tucker and his colleague Steven T. Byington participated in a series of debates with Marsden in the pages of these journals that helped illuminate the differences between individualist anarchism and the edgier, more Stirnerite philosophical orientation of egoism as interpreted by Marsden.

Marsden related Stirner's thought to the social issues of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in America and Europe.<sup>2</sup> Her writings reveal significant differences in the interpretations and expressions of Stirner, anarchism, and egoism from Tucker, Walker, and other individualist anarchists. Marsden's political activism and writings reflect a dialogue between feminism and egoism, which eventually discarded the former as insufficiently individualist. While she is clearly antistatist, Marsden was also very critical of anarchism as another form of humanism, reflecting Stirner's summation of modernist thought. Marsden was concerned that both feminism and anarchism were the new forms of collectivism, adumbrating more modernist constraints on the individual. She proudly counterposed her "egoist and anarchist" political philosophy against Tucker's anarchism. This chapter discusses the contributions of egoist thought to the struggle for gender emancipation as expressed in the writings of Dora Marsden, and continues an exploration into the relationship between egoism and anarchism.

Dora Marsden was born in 1882 in Marsden, Yorkshire, Great Britain. In 1890, her father abandoned the family after the textile plant that employed him closed. She began working as a tutor at the age of thirteen sponsored by the 1870 Education Act that provided scholarships and stipends for advanced students who assisted teachers. She studied at the University of Manchester from 1900 to 1903 and then worked full-time as a teacher for five years. Marsden became involved with the women's suffrage movement as a student in Manchester and later left her teaching career to work as a full-time organizer. In 1909 she accepted a full-time position as an organizer with the Women's Social and Political Union, but left in 1911 because of conflicts with the leadership over both the tactics and political goals of the suffrage movement. In November 1911, she co-founded and edited *The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review*. *The Freewoman* was followed in 1912 by *The New Freewoman* and in 1914 by *The Egoist*. As editor of these three journals, Marsden had a reputation for cultivating young, innovative writers, and, thus, published some of the early works of Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Rebecca West, D. H. Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot. She also had a reputation for a quick and sharp wit that was frequently directed toward some of the more vulnerable arguments by contributors to her journals. Although *The Egoist* continued publication

until December 1919, Marsden relinquished editorial responsibilities to Harriett Shaw Weaver, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot by 1915.

The pages of *The Freewoman* were filled with a broad array of philosophical perspectives that included contributions by feminists, socialists, anarchists, free love radicals, poets, and spiritualists. The very first issue included an article by Marsden entitled, "Bondwomen," that outlined the philosophic differences between women who were content to "remain (in) a permanently subordinate position" and freewomen who rejected all forms of domination, including the democratic state, in favor of drawing on their own resources for their liberation.<sup>3</sup> From the outset, Marsden's fiery libertarian feminism, which had a significant Stirnerite orientation, set the tone of the discourse in the journal that nevertheless encouraged considerable theoretical diversity among the advocates of varied sexual and extreme individualist political orientations. *The Freewoman* not only excited the interest of marginalized sexual, cultural, and political radicals, it drew the ire of more traditional sectors of British society. Ultimately, *The Freewoman* ceased publication because distributors, such as W. H. Smith bookstores, refused to carry the heterodoxical journal. The articles arguing for anarchism, tolerance for homosexuals, and that counseled women not to marry offended more conservative customers.

Despite the setback, Marsden and the circle of feminists, anarchists, and literary radicals surrounding her remained committed to a continuation of the efforts initiated in *The Freewoman*. In June 1913, with the help of Harriett Shaw Weaver, Marsden launched *The New Freewoman*, which was intended to be the successor to the *Freewoman* except for the inclusion of a more pronounced literary tendency, as indicated by the appointment of Ezra Pound as literary editor of the new journal. The first issue of *The New Freewoman* was led by an article by Marsden titled, "The Lean Kind," and a lengthy essay in the "Views and Comments" section of the journal on suffragism. The essays applied Stirner's critique of social movements, or "causes," to the cultural control of the poor and the limited objectives of the suffrage movement. Marsden argues that the individual's subordination to an external "cause," whether it is suffragism or ameliorating poverty is another form of domination because causes tend to have autocratic structures and tend to serve collectivist goals. By this time, Marsden had broken with the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the suffrage movement generally. She describes the WSPU as an autocratic organization that served only the interests of its leadership and prevented its followers from articulating and pursuing their own goals regarding the status of women in society. She concludes both pieces by arguing that, "[t]he intensive satisfaction of the self is for the individual the one goal in life."<sup>4</sup> The Stirnerite tone and content of the first issue served as a

harbinger of the editorial position of *The New Freewoman* until its final issue in December 1913.

Marsden has been called “the Stirner of Feminism” because of her application of Stirner’s concepts and other egoist ideas to the struggle for the emancipation of women, and her critique of modernist culture and anarchist politics. Although *The Ego and Its Own* was written in the early 1840s, its major impact occurred in Europe in the early twentieth century. Thanks to the 1907 translation by Steven T. Byington and the egoist pathway opened by Nietzsche, *The Ego and Its Own* became a hallmark for rebellious intellectuals who came into their maturity before World War I.<sup>5</sup> The characterization of Marsden as the “Stirner of Feminism” is questionable, however. The significant phase of Stirner’s literary career was fairly limited, spanning the period from 1842 to 1844. He wrote several articles and one book that have enduring philosophic significance. Consequently, there is little or no record of Stirner’s philosophic development over time, in which he discarded some positions in favor of others. Whatever insights and contradictions appear in Stirner’s thought, they appeared over the course of just a few years. Over the course of Marsden’s literary career there is ample evidence of development and change in her thought, revealing both similarities and profound differences with Stirner. During the later years of her life, Stirner’s thought appears infrequently in Marsden’s writings.

“The Stirner of Feminism” moniker is also misleading because it reduces Marsden to a feminist, a label she disputed. It suggests an easy synthesis of Stirner’s thought with the movement of suffragists and feminists in the early twentieth century. In fact, Marsden rejected the political goals and organization of the suffragist movement and became a staunch critic of the forms of feminism that sought “protection” for women through state policy. Marsden believed that, ultimately, the liberation of women had everything to do with individual women relying on their own abilities and resources, and had little to do with participation in elections and parliamentary politics. By the end of 1913, she believed that “egoism” was a better descriptor of her thought than feminism, so much so that she renamed *The New Freewoman* as *The Egoist* for precisely that reason.

The time has come when mentally honest women feel that they have no use for the springing board of large promises of powers redeemable in a distant future. Just as they feel they can be as “free” now as they have the power to be, they know that their works can give evidence now of whatever quality they are capable of giving to them. To attempt to be “freer” than their own power warrants means—that curious thing—“protected freedom,” and their ability, allowed credit because it is women’s, is a “protected” ability. “Freedom” and ability “recognized” by permission, are privileges which they find can serve no useful purpose.<sup>6</sup>

Marsden's rationale for changing the journal's name is a clear reference to Stirner's view of self-liberation in the "here and now," and a refusal to look to the state or to external causes for one's emancipation. The change in the journal's title to *The Egoist* is an important indicator of Marsden's philosophic transformation from feminist to egoist. If the focus is on Marsden's work during the life-span of *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *The Egoist*, from November 1911 to December 1919, Marsden's writings revealed an ongoing philosophical "conversation" with Stirner. She not only applied his concepts in her critique of sexism and modernity, but recognized that the implications of egoism go far beyond the conceptual horizon offered by the feminism of her time.

In the articles she wrote in the three journals, particularly from 1911 to 1914, Marsden articulated a philosophy that was certainly informed by Stirner. She consistently used its basic elements to interpret political and cultural events and to attack critics and political opponents. While her egoist thought did not disappear immediately, it became clear that Marsden's interests eventually changed in favor of outlining a new type of "anthropology" or "lingual psychology" that included egoism, but also ventured into the "empirical" discoveries in social science that were being popularized in the early twentieth century. From 1916 to 1919, she published a series of eighteen articles entitled, "The Science of Signs," which argue against the identification of "first principles" and the use of "fact" and language as the conceptual bases for the reconstruction of philosophy and social science. The result was a mix of Stirner, Nietzsche, structuralism, and the idealism of George Berkeley. It focused on sensory experience and the psychology of language as a means of understanding how autonomous egos construct an organized sense of the world.<sup>7</sup> After the dissolution of *The Egoist* in 1919, Marsden retreated to the lake country of England to write books that developed this new anthropology. These included *The Definition of the Godhead* in 1928, *The Mysteries of Christianity* in 1930, and *The Philosophy of Time* in 1955.<sup>8</sup> She suffered from depression in the last twenty-five years of her life and died in December 1960 in a home for women convalescing from psychological problems. From the standpoint of an egoist critic, it seems clear that Marsden lost her way in attempting to unravel the mysteries of the cosmos. This is regrettable because she could have become the preeminent egoist philosopher if she had continued to develop and interpret the Stirnerite elements that appeared in her writings especially from 1911 to 1914. The concern of this chapter is with the relationship of Marsden's egoism with Stirner's as expressed in her writings from 1911 to 1914. Of particular interest are Marsden's discussions about Stirner and her application of Stirnerite concepts to culture, gender, and politics, which she mocked as the Holy Trinity: the Cult of Humanity, the Cult of Suffragism, and the Worship of Democracy.

The following sections review Marsden's Holy Trinity by examining her critique of culture, feminism as a social movement, and anarchism in favor of "egoism and archism."

### MARSDEN, STIRNER, AND THE CRITIQUE OF CULTURE

Marsden grappled with the political meaning of egoism during these years and had an ongoing philosophic confrontation with Benjamin Tucker over the question of whether Stirner's egoism leads to individualist anarchism, or to a position that Marsden called "archism," a rejection of the limitations on thought and behavior set by Tucker's notion of "equal liberty." In her view, Stirner's dialectical egoism is more of a justification for a will to power and property, rather than a forerunner of Tucker's concept of equal liberty. The basic questions this section addresses include, how did Marsden view Stirner and how did she use Stirner's concepts and arguments in her analyses of feminism, culture, and politics, particularly from 1911 to 1914? To what extent is her egoism and "archism," based on or compatible with Stirner's concept of "ownness?" Marsden does not use Stirner's term, but it is clear that she retains an idea of ownness as she works out a concept of egoism appropriate to the circumstances she analyzed. While Stirner's Hegelianism was absent in Tucker's work, it reappears in Marsden's writings and theorizing. Marsden retains a form of the dialectic as she frequently counterposes conflicting ideas and social forces, identifying the "higher presuppositions" resulting from their conflict. In fact, in her political writings, "egoism" and "archism" may be understood as the outcome of the conflict between statism and anarchism, and as the outcome of the conflict between female bondage and feminism.

The first time Marsden comments on Stirner and *The Ego and Its Own* is in an article entitled, "The Growing Ego," that appeared on August 8, 1912, in *The Freewoman*.<sup>9</sup> Marsden says that she wants to modify Stirner's concept of god and religion and, by implication, his theory of alienation and reification. In response to a contributor, Marsden promises to subject Stirner's philosophy to a thorough test in a future issue, but argues that the journal needs to gain control over the "penetrative influence" that *The Ego and Its Own* has on *The Freewoman*. The profound truth of Stirner's book must be "put aside" and she must expose the "abrupt and impossible termination of its thesis." She suggests that Stirner destroyed the concepts of ethics, religion, god, and humanity as external powers that dominate the ego. In itself, this was not a particularly profound accomplishment since these concepts were phantoms anyway. If the ego needs the "realization of itself in morality, or religion, or God, then by virtue of its own supremacy, the realization will be forthcoming." The source of the

construction of these ghosts or phantoms is the ego. If alienated thoughts are a problem, then the source of the problem is within the ego. There are positive elements, or personalities, in the ego that are realized in the external world and experienced by others. The idea of god is the external reflection of the positive elements in persons. The idea of god originates from the ego without external mediation and has nothing to do with external authority. She concludes, “[I]et us agree with Stirner that God neither postulates nor controls the ego. But the ego does postulate God.”<sup>10</sup>

In this early effort Marsden appears to reject Stirner’s multilayered approach to understanding alienation and reification, in favor of a highly nominalistic conception of knowledge. Stirner, the student of Hegel, would never agree that any form of alienation, including the idea of god, has nothing to do with external forces. Neither does *The Ego and Its Own* argue that the problems of alienation and reification can be solved just by individuals getting their thinking straight. It is quite clear from Stirner’s discussion of antiquity and modernity that sociohistorical forces have quite a bit to do with concepts of god. Ideas or concepts of god vary greatly with different sociohistorical circumstances, and so does the nature of knowledge and alienation. Marsden initiated an intellectual campaign that was intended to attack all ideas that keep women in a servile position, including the notion that ideas are rooted in external phenomena.

Over time, Marsden modified her own position, however, acknowledging that knowledge is the result of interaction between the individual and external forces. She soon makes very direct statements about Stirner that demonstrate her intellectual debt to him. In her “Views and Comments” section in the first issue of *The Egoist*, Marsden objects to a reader’s fairly innocent compliment that her journals have a “Stirnerian” editorial slant. Marsden responds that her “egoistic temper” prevents her from accepting pleasant compliments without a protest when they are undeserved. She says,

If our beer bears a resemblance in flavor to other brands, it is due to the similarity of taste in the makers. “Stirnerian” therefore is not the adjective fittingly to be applied to the egoism of *The Egoist*. What the appropriate term would be we can omit to state. Having said this, we do not seek to minimize the amount of Stirner which may be traced herein. The contrary rather, since having no fear that creative genius folded its wings when Stirner laid down his pen, we would gladly credit to him—unlike so many of the individualists who have enriched themselves somewhat at his hands—the full measure of his astounding creativeness. For it is not the smallness in measure of what one takes away from genius one admires which is creditable.<sup>11</sup>

She rejects the identification of her journals as Stirnerian based on an objection to “the comedy of discipleship,” which places the disciple in a



docile, uncritical role of servitude to the wisdom already constructed by the teacher. In Marsden's view, the reduction of her egoist thought to "Stirnerian" was something of a contradiction since it repudiates the new directions and new contributions that unique individuals develop. The form of egoist thought Stirner initiated is not a fully developed, fixed body of knowledge, but more like a stream that *The Egoist* draws from as appropriate to the topic or to the development of an idea. *The Egoist* draws from Stirner, not in "thimblefuls," but in "great pots," because "we recognize his value."<sup>12</sup> The measure of *The Egoist's* relationship to Stirner's egoism is found in the critical application of his concepts to cultural and political events, not in an uncritical recitation of quotes and principles.

Marsden never produced the test of Stirner's ideas that she promised. There is ample evidence in her analytical articles of the influence Stirner had on her thought and how she used his concepts in her writings on suffragism, culture, and politics. The examples of articles and cultural topics in which Marsden applies concepts taken from Stirner are legion. There is a structure to her writing and thinking about culture that reflects a definite Stirnerite approach. First, she writes about many examples of fixed ideas or prevailing cultural values, demonstrating that they present culture as an absolute that cannot be questioned and that fixes human relationships into permanent patterns, with individuals subordinate to social institutions. She attacks societal sacred cows such as "duty," "equality," "democracy," "honor," "chastity," "fidelity," "the ten commandments," "morality," "good will," and "humanitarianism." Second, she demonstrates that the prevailing cultural values, or fixed ideas, are oriented toward promoting or elevating collective identities and interests above the autonomy and uniqueness of individuals. The promotion of humanitarianism, goodwill toward others, culture, subordination to social causes, and the state are important examples.

Third, she demonstrates that the promotion of collectivist cultural constructs has an impact on social relationships and individuals. Most significantly, collectivist cultural ideas encourage and legitimate the formation of behavioral monopolies which exclude and punish outsiders and nonconformists. Fourth, the two basic processes in modernity that affect individuals in everyday life are "embargoism" and "ragamuffinism." Embargoism creates social boundaries that enhance the solidarity and collective identity of an in-group and punishes others. It also places limits on what individuals can and cannot think and do. Ragamuffinism emphasizes the dispossession of property and power from individuals, and the diminution of their independence and self-reliance.<sup>13</sup> For Marsden, culture is (a) society's amalgam of fixed ideas that function to (b) homogenize behavior and thought by subordinating individuals to external causes, and (c) level persons downward by dispossessing them of prop-

erty and power. Egoism is the enemy of culture and the state because it challenges "embargoism" and "ragamuffinism" in everyday life.

Fixed ideas become elevated as cultural absolutes because modernity is characterized by alienated thought or the "gadding mind." The thought of individuals in the "normal order" is oriented toward "alien causes" that typically condemn the self to a very limited set of aspirations and expectations. But minds are restless and seek a home in the great causes of democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity, women's rights, or ethnic purity. Modernity cultivates a personality archetype Marsden calls the "lean kind" which denies the possession of a self that has desires and aspirations, and gravitates toward causes and movements to fill the void left by the diminutive self.<sup>14</sup> "Leanness" in self, self-interest, and intent to appropriate the world is the preferred quality of individuals in the modern world. In modernity, the assertion of the self with desires is an "embarrassing notion." Modern individuals have a proclivity to ally, define, and commit themselves to religious, political, and social causes in order to meet a cultural value that enforces servitude to an external force and self-sacrifice to an ideal. "Great is the cause and small are men." The greater the cause, and the greater the sacrifice, the greater the cultural approbation. The greater the cause, the greater the shame in resistance; hence, the greater the punishment.

Marsden uses many examples in her writings that demonstrate how fixed ideas function to subordinate persons to causes and social institutions. One example that reappears in her writing is clearly derived from Stirner: property and the dispossession of individuals. Like Stirner and Tucker, Marsden is extremely concerned about the divide between rich and poor, the possessors and the dispossessed. She is particularly interested in understanding how the dispossessed are so easily pacified. She argues that cultural values such as "honesty" have a social control function that is especially directed at the poor since it encourages a "righteous frenzy for the maintenance of the status quo in regard to property."<sup>15</sup> The distribution of property and power is always in flux in the social process, or the war of each against all. By elevating and inculcating the value of honesty in the hearts and minds of persons modernist culture pacifies anger and resentment as individuals are dispossessed of property and power. Honesty becomes a fixed and absolute guide for the behavior of the rich and poor alike, but it deprives the poor of alternative or insurrectionary means to assert their interests and appropriate property and power. The cultural value of honesty is a weapon that the possessors use against the dispossessed to protect the existing class structure. It is an element of ideological warfare that protects the supremacy of the possessors. Once property is seized in the war of each against all, the possessors work to make the divide permanent and legitimate. The state is an important

actor in this process since it threatens and employs physical force to keep the dispossessed at bay. Culture is also important since it creates the internal police to keep the dispossessed from asserting their self-interests. What was once in flux, becomes fixed, static, and permanent.

Culture instills the “great principles” of a society as the state and the possessors intend; it “inculcates the properly submissive state of mind” which the dispossessed are required to “carry into effect.”<sup>16</sup> The resources available for individual self-assertion in modernity are extremely limited. It is the role of culture to protect and defend the limits placed on the egoism of persons. It says, “this far and no farther.” Culture, like the state, functions on the “embargo principle” by defining what persons can and cannot do, say, and think. It imposes an embargo on behaviors that test the limits of action and speech. It punishes the persons who defy the embargo. Culture differs from the state in that its demarcation of acceptable from unacceptable behaviors is reinforced by “thou ought” and “thou ought not” prescriptions that are beyond examination and critique. Culture imposes morality on persons whose proclivities are toward egoism and resistance.

Culture’s function is to compose paeans of praise to the great gods, and build a system of embargos—the codes of behavior—for the small persons whose gods are of such trifling proportions as to confer on their creators nothing more than the status of weeds.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of culture is to fix behavior. It is the accumulation of thought and artifact that is no longer vibrant, virile, or creative. It serves the extant, ancient, and decrepit. Culture is opposed, not by static *thought*, but by *thinking*, which is the process of destroying or replacing thought. All that is vibrant, virile, and creative is at war with culture and its synonym, thought. Thinking is the initial means by which persons fight the war with culture and thought. Culture is contested terrain. Its goal is to fix human behavior, but it is also continually challenged by persons who are not happy about their dispossession.<sup>18</sup>

In modernity, culture has little to say about “individual fighting,” one of its most descriptive and depressing features. Discourse and behavior are “fitted to social custom” and place the premium on commonality, safety, and compliance, not autonomy, challenge, and struggle. Marsden frequently begins her discussions by introducing a concept or quote from Stirner and relating it to events or controversies in Great Britain. She provides an in-depth discussion of Stirner in the “Views and Comments” section of the September 1, 1913, issue of *The New Freewoman* which offers a critique of the influence of socialist ideology on the feminist movement in Great Britain. This essay develops her concept of “embargoism” and reintroduces Stirner’s concept of the “ragamuffin.” Marsden describes *The*

*Ego and Its Own* in this essay as “the most powerful work that has ever emerged from a single human mind.”<sup>19</sup> She says that Stirner’s work has contemporary relevance to socialism and feminism in part because his notion of the “ragamuffin” aptly describes the type of person that these movements were attempting to create in the early twentieth century. In Stirner’s critique of social liberalism and humanism, the ragamuffin is the person who is propertyless and powerless, and who embraces the status of dispossession. Marsden summarizes the ragamuffin:

He is the ideal citizen, the pattern in whose presence the defective property-owning ones feel themselves rightly under reproach. The nobler among these latter are merely hesitating in their choice of the best means of divesting themselves of their property that they may become ragamuffins too, when they will have become good citizens—no longer a menace to the equal authority of the state.<sup>20</sup>

Marsden argues that socialism and the labor movement collude to make ragamuffinhood the normal circumstance in democratic, industrial societies. Their collusion with suffragism and feminism has devastating implications for individual autonomy from the state and collectivist constructs of culture. In opposition to socialist and labor arguments that the path to overcoming wage-slavery under capitalism is the consolidation of all productive property into a monopoly owned by the state, Marsden argues that deprivation is still deprivation regardless of whether it is the state or the capitalist who deprives labor of power, property, and its rightful earnings. The true spirit of the ragamuffin is espoused by labor, socialist, and feminist advocates alike who make propertylessness the “foundation-stone of their new Utopia.” The promise by socialists and labor advocates is that the new “property” of the ragamuffins is the “monopoly of their own labor power” which, ultimately, is to be appropriated and allocated by the state in the interests of all. The promise is not matched by the fact that the state appropriates and allocates in its own interests.

Labor power is fundamentally the power of one’s own mind and body, which individuals have a monopoly over in a presocial and prepolitical environment. No one else can use an individual’s labor power except through coercion or the individual’s submission to external directives. The evolving problem with capitalism is the concentration and centralization of productive property, leaving the mass of workers with nothing but their labor power to earn a living. Socialism has a simplistic appeal to the dispossessed and those fearing dispossession. The practical meaning of a “monopoly of labor power,” the vision of the socialist alternative, is the forcible imposition of an embargo on free labor, or labor that exists outside the control of unions or labor guilds.

What then does this acquiring of a monopoly of labor power, which is to be carried through by the guilds, mean? If it cannot be a war of defense, it must be a war of aggression. This is exactly what it turns out to be. It is an attempt to lay an embargo upon the exercising of the labor power possessed by those outside the guild, a very frank attempt to establish a tyranny.<sup>21</sup>

The origin of this collectivist tyranny is in the attack on free labor and the advocacy by socialist unions and political parties for “vesting all properties, land, mines, railways and the like in the hands of the state.” Socialist ideology also promotes limiting access to the use of these properties through a “partnership between workmen and the state,” ensuring that workers are “into the union or starve.” The goal of socialist ideology is to create an environment in which the state guarantees that nothing stands between the “monopoly of labor power” and the ability of the individual to survive physically. The objective of the unions, the guilds, and the socialist movement is to reduce people to ragamuffins by dispossessing them of the “labor power” they inherently possess and transferring it to the state. The wage-slavery of capitalism is replaced by the wage-slavery of socialism.

The cultural elite of modernity promotes ragamuffinism as “the right thing” because it hates the thought of its alternative: the independence of the labor power of individuals and its corollary, responsibility for one’s own life. The last thing the leadership of the unions, the guilds, the socialist political parties, and the feminist organizations want is “widespread individual ownership.” The problems of labor cannot be solved by the “monopolization of labor power” by the unions and the state, but the trend toward monopolization and ragamuffinism has deep historical roots. Marsden argues that there is an inherent difficulty in the culture of modernity, or in modern civilization. Culture, modernity, and civilization take the “pugnacious energy” out of people, men and women alike.

Faced with the rigors of nature, they have not the audacious pertinacity of more primitive peoples. The great mass of men are only too glad to creep under the sheltering arm of the few who prove relatively daring, no matter on what ignominious terms of dependence, rather than face the task of justifying their existence by maintaining it. They feel safer, herded together, all mutually responsible, and none wholly responsible.<sup>22</sup>

The culture of modernity is comprised of the “logic of embargoism” and the “spirit of ragamuffinism.” Embargoism is the intentional exclusion and punishment of nonconformity, independence, and autonomy. Ragamuffinism is the gleeful self-dispossession of property and power. Both embargoism and ragamuffinism elevate what Marsden calls “humanitarianism” and what Stirner calls “humanism.” It is the idea that

human collectives are inviolable facts, not concepts, and should be revered and served. "Timid hearts and feeble minds have made common cause to raise up false gods."<sup>23</sup> Socialism, suffragism, and feminism are expressions of humanitarianism because they all enforce the notion that the "cause is great and the person is small." The logic of embargoism and the spirit of ragamuffinism characterize the cultural values and the ideological horizon of solutions to the problems of modernity, especially those associated with urbanism, industrialization, and the concentration and centralization of property. The culture of modernity is the triumph of the logic of embargoism and the spirit of ragamuffinism. The proponents of dispossession wield power and authority, suppressing independence, otherness, and the human drive toward appropriation. Modernity is the generalization and enforcement of dispossession. It is the contradictory philosophy of modernist political ideologies, including socialism and feminism: all persons must be dispossessed of property and power to ensure that all participate in the possession of property and power. It is the systematic reduction of all individuals to ragamuffinhood. "Thus shall we be when all of us must have nothing so that all may have."<sup>24</sup> Marsden's reintroduction of Stirner's concept of the ragamuffin illuminates the parallel between the socialist intention to monopolize labor power through the statist appropriation of property and the feminist intention to collectivize the struggles of women. Modernity is the theory and practice of ragamuffinism.

### FROM FEMINISM TO EGOISM

Marsden discovered that the "guild doctrine" of ragamuffinism appears in the struggle for women's equality. The early advocates for suffragism and feminism argue that "women should create a guild monopoly of their sex, and utilize it to force a partnership between themselves and men. Guilds for men. Marriage for women."<sup>25</sup> Marsden criticizes unequal power relations in marriage and fights against the cultural prescription that demands marriage for women. She ridicules the notions that women should view themselves as a guild and that marriage should be viewed as an absolute element of the emancipation of women. The feminist argument suggests that the "guild for women" entails a similar form of embargoism that would marginalize unmarried women, ostracize and fine unmarried men, and promote the interests of married women through the power of the vote. For the suffragists, the vote was the practical tool that would be used to impose "purity and morals" in society through advocacy for the elimination of prostitution and venereal disease. Men will be persecuted through a "steadily rising scale" of charges, partner's

maintenance, children's maintenance, even being refused admission to their own homes if they succumb to vice and indolence. Women will also seek complete control of sexual relations within marriage and a legal claim upon men's incomes. The meaning of feminist promises to enforce cultural expectations for marriage is that punishments for philandering males, financial disincentives for single men, and humiliations for single women will ensure marriage as a safe and cheap way out of the threats of the feminist embargo. Marsden concludes that "for guild-women the guild-monopoly of their sex will have become absolute—a quite natural development of the guild-monopoly theory."<sup>26</sup> For Marsden, it is contradictory to argue that the emancipation of women can be achieved through their submission to marriage and the state. The replacement of a male-dominated monopoly by a governmental monopoly is not a path to liberation.

Marsden's relationship to both the activism and philosophy of suffragism and incipient feminism was complex and contentious from the outset. While she was a lifelong advocate for women, it is also true that she was a relentless critic of suffragism and feminism, especially during her tenure as editor of *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *The Egoist* from 1911 to 1914. Her dissidence from modernity led her to adopt a strident form of egoism that, in her view, replaced or supplanted feminist philosophy. The suffrage movement in Great Britain achieved the apex of its notoriety and public support before World War I, primarily through the agitation, civil disobedience, and political theater of the Women's Political and Social Union. The period from 1908 to 1914 provided the WPSU with a particularly good opportunity to build the organization and the movement. Based on her initial work in the WPSU, Marsden was viewed by the leadership, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, as an extremely talented and passionate fighter for women's liberation. The leadership of the WPSU intended to cultivate Marsden's talents in public speaking and organization to build membership and raise funds for the organization. The expectation was that she would support the organization's plan for growth, following directives from the WPSU leadership. But Marsden always expressed a "theatrical genius for spectacular antagonism," using rhetoric and street theater to draw attention to women's issues by provoking authorities. Her "organizational" and "fundraising" activities tended to become forms of street theater that dramatized her evolving, aggressive concept of feminist individualism. She was arrested several times, spent time in jail, participated in a hunger strike, and was brutally forced, enduring lifelong injuries as a result. She was always more of a fighter and provocateur than a disciplined functionary, a fact that increasingly annoyed the WPSU leadership. The problem she experienced in her political activism can be summarized by saying that the Pankhursts

wanted "to turn an anarchist into a bureaucrat," a transformation that Marsden resisted on a visceral level.<sup>27</sup>

By 1909, Marsden read Stirner and Nietzsche and was interested in developing a deeper understanding of Stirner's critique of ideology and social movements. In politics, she demonstrated a clear preference for independent, direct action, rather than what she saw as the plodding, authoritarian, and collectivist inaction of a cumbersome organization. She had little regard for the strategic plans and the hierarchical decision making of the suffragist establishment. Consequently, Marsden was increasingly viewed by the WPSU leadership as a liability and a "loose cannon."<sup>28</sup> Her resignation from the Women's Social and Political Union in 1911 was due in roughly equal measures to her disagreements with the tactics of the WPSU, philosophic differences with the political goals of suffragism, and a refusal to submit her organization and fundraising activities for prior approval from the Pankhursts and their associates. With the founding of *The Freewoman* in 1911, Marsden's career as a political activist was substantially over and her career as a writer, editor, and radical public intellectual began.

Marsden's analysis and commentary on suffragism and feminism was dispersed throughout all three of her journals. While she took considerable delight in ridiculing the leadership of the WPSU and attacking the broader suffragist and feminist movements, Marsden's struggle with the issues pertaining to women's liberation propelled her to articulate an egoist position on culture and politics. Her egoism undoubtedly evolved from her reading of Stirner, but it acquired a form, content, and rhythm in her encounters with the theory and movement of suffragism and feminism. She provided a critique of the suffragist concept of freedom, the centralist tendencies of social movements, and the notion that persons can be liberated by the state, all of which reflect the application of Stirner's concepts to social movements. Toward the end of her tenure as editor of *The Egoist* in June 1914, she reflected on the emerging frustration within the suffrage movement, specifically within the WPSU, with the "interminable reiteration and threadbare arguments" of a cause that had been thrust upon new generation of women as an urgent issue.<sup>29</sup> Marsden doubts that suffragism approached anything remotely urgent in large part because its advocates were only "nominally" concerned with suffrage and the challenges women face in everyday life.

What was called the suffrage movement was more concerned with institutionalizing and maintaining the hierarchy within the WPSU, which meant discrediting the political opponents of the Pankhurst family and its associates. Marsden argues that political movements typically lose their passion and direction over time, and create "mournful and monotonous" rituals that reify the memories and myths about the contributions of the



leaders to the "cause." The adherents, who seek participation in the movement initially to get help with problems they face in everyday life, are eventually reduced to the status of "claimants" who are encouraged to confuse solutions to their grievances with the hierarchy's "rhetoric of freedom." Claimants are the low-level units in the cause who make claims that they must receive "rights" in order to be "free." For Marsden, social and political "claims are reproaches of the powerless: whines for protection. All the suffragists' 'claims' are of this order."<sup>30</sup> Whines for protection are nothing less than appeals to powerful others, particularly the movement's leadership and the state, to relieve the individual of responsibility, power, and property. The whine is the discourse of the ragamuffin. Marsden's goal in writing about the fixed ideas of political movements is to disentangle the claims for rights and protection from "the center of power: the self. One has the freedom if one has the power, and the measure of power is one's own concern." The collectivization of grievances is the institutionalization of ragamuffinism.

The article "Bondwomen" in the initial issue of *The Freewoman* in November 1911 outlined the philosophic direction Marsden planned for the journal. It also provided her an opportunity to differentiate her position from that of the WPSU.<sup>31</sup> "Bondwomen" is a grand critique of the status of women in society that counterposes the concept of the "bondwoman" with the "freewoman," arguing that suffragism and feminism are inadequate paths to freedom since they only reproduce ragamuffinism in a new form. This theme was reiterated in several articles that appeared in *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman*. Her articles and commentary in *The Egoist* more forcefully express the notion that the matters concerning the servile condition of women have a broader meaning. That is, the goal of philosophy is not the liberation of women, but the self-liberation of the individual. It is overcoming ragamuffinism in all of its forms.

Her initial foray into the philosophy of liberation in *The Freewoman* still provides strong indications of Marsden's developing egoism and the influence of Stirner, although it contains terminology that he certainly avoided. For example, Marsden uses the terms "spirit" and "spiritual" frequently to signify the woman passion and intentionality, and not in either a religious or Hegelian sense. Nevertheless, even her early articles reveal Stirner's concepts and the dialectical method that Marsden would use consistently in her articles and editorials in all three journals. Her method begins with a stark, dramatic, and controversial statement about her topic. She follows this with a more analytical, thoughtful discussion that is intended to reveal the dialectical development of the issue. Antagonisms appear at the beginning of the essay and persist until a resolution appears at the end. Antagonisms between concepts or social forces are resolved in the direction of egoism, or the notion that the individual must draw on his or her own will

and resources to assert power or acquire property.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the antagonism between the traditional "servile condition" of women and the suffrage movement reveals that suffragism produces only another form of "bondwomen." The conflict between traditional servility and suffragism is supplanted by egoism as the higher presupposition.

"Bondwomen" differ from "freewomen" by a fundamental distinction: they are not autonomous individuals; they do not have a will, spirit, or intent of their own. There is nothing that establishes them as unique, independent individuals. "They are complements merely. By habit of thought, by form of activity, and largely by preference, they round off the personality of some other individual, rather than cultivate their own."<sup>33</sup> Historically, "bondwomen" defines the status and working practice of women. Using the concepts of master and servant, Marsden argues that women as a category have demonstrated in the past little but the attributes of the "servant," while the qualities of the "master," such as imposing law, setting standards, establishing rights and duties, acquiring property, have been relegated to men. Women have been the "followers, believers, the law-abiding, the moral, the conventionally admiring" whose virtues are those of a subordinate class. Women have served as functionaries and servants. They live by the "borrowed precepts" issued by men. Societal hierarchies ensure that some men must be servants, but all women are servants and all the masters are men. What fundamentally characterizes women is their servile condition.

The ultimate goal of the struggle for women's freedom is mastery or self-ownership. Self-ownership is impossible without the ownership of something external to oneself. In order for women to own themselves, they must own material property. Without property persons are forced to sell themselves or their labor power to others who can exchange labor power for either wages or gifts in kind necessary to survival. Outside of economic relationships, persons without power must barter what they have for the desiderata they seek from the world and from others. The person who lacks property cannot be his or her own master, cannot own self, cannot be autonomous, and cannot have an independent will. The person who lacks property must become a "hired man," selling labor power or bartering personal resources for material survival, comfort, and security. The dialectic of powerlessness and propertylessness makes it possible to understand women's struggles in modernizing societies. She says that women on the whole own little or no property. Consequently, the process of bartering themselves begins immediately and occurs almost automatically on a daily basis. The key to liberation is breaking this process by asserting power and acquiring property, overcoming ragamuffinism.

Marsden is not interested in detailing the history of the oppression of women, she wants to understand its modern manifestations and to pro-

voke rebellion against it. In order to do so, she says it is important to acknowledge that women bear responsibility for both their oppression and their liberation. Oppression and liberation have both an internal and external component. Women will never be free of their bondage unless they understand how they have contributed to it. The reason why men have been historically successful in “crushing” women down is because women were “down in themselves—i.e., weaker in mind.” Those who are pushed to the lower rungs of the social hierarchy are inferior, in part, because they believe themselves to be inferior. To change the status of women, women must change how they view themselves. “When change takes place in the thing itself—i.e., when it becomes equal or superior—by the nature of its own being it rises.”<sup>34</sup> In modernity, the servile condition of women is manifest in their “protected” status; they are “protected” by men, culture, and the state. The protected status helps explain the contradictory and “stupefying influence of security and irresponsibility” which “soothes women into a willing acceptance” of their social status. Protection means that security is conferred on women, but they must relinquish their power to earn, think, and assert responsibility for their lives. Political movements and advocacy for women must be assessed from this perspective. To what extent do suffragism and feminism advocate in theory and practice the overcoming of the “protected status” of women in favor of self-ownership? To what extent do suffragism and feminism advocate for self-ownership and the replacement of bondwomen by freewomen? To what extent do suffragism and feminism promote the acquisition of property and power by women?

The political choice for women is to either “sink back” into the historical status of propertylessness and powerlessness, or to “stand recognized as ‘master’ among other ‘masters.’” Marsden is not convinced that suffragism and feminism are viable paths to liberation. The “cult of suffragism” begins from a premise that conceptualizes an inferior and subordinate status for women. It “takes its stand upon the weakness and dejectedness of the conditions of women.” It says, “Are women not weak? Are women not crushed down? Are women not in need of protection? Therefore, give them the means wherewith they may be protected.”<sup>35</sup> For suffragism and the feminism of early the early twentieth century, the conferral of “the means wherewith they may be protected” equates with acquiring the vote and participation in the making of law that protects women. It is the conferral of “courtesy rights,” or the political fulfillment of a humanitarian belief that women should have “rights” in order to be protected from the more egregious consequences of servitude. It is not, in itself, the overcoming of servitude. Rights are conferred by the state as a modernist courtesy to women. The basic element of suffragist ideology is that women’s freedom is achieved through women participating in the

making of law that is oriented to the protection of women, hardly a break from ragamuffinism.

Marsden also believed that the theory and strategy of suffragism was flawed because it was based on a concept of freedom that she rejected. Freedom to the egoist is an act, it is not a condition, nor a state of being. The concept of "freedom" presumes a condition in which persons experience what is inherent in the *condition* and not in their *activity*. But this is a contradiction because there is no condition in which freedom is experienced by inert objects; there is only the activity of freeing oneself. The act of freeing oneself may acquire an "atmosphere" in which meanings are attributed to actions by an external observer, but the act is fundamentally the notion of a force breaking through a barrier. The "breakthrough" is a single act of "getting free." It is a definite, specific action that has a limited timeframe, a beginning, an end, and a duration that can be known. Once the act occurs, it is complete. It does not entail "an independent existence on its own account," it does not become an objective, external condition. It does not occupy any space; it only occurs in time. Any "separate existence" of the act is only "atmosphere" existing in the discourse and memories of external observers. Everyday life is a process of "overcoming specific resistances" to the trajectory of individual behavior. Breaking through the barriers is "an individual affair which must be operated in one's own person." Only one person who is really concerned about the freeing of the individual is the person who wears, feels, and resents the shackles. The shackles must be broken by the person. If they are released by an external agent, they will eventually reappear at the caprice of a powerful, more determined other. As used by the suffragists, or the agents of any political movement, "freedom" is the atmosphere attributed to actions that have been "worked up" or reified to serve organizational interests. The atmosphere, the reified actions, is the "vicious exploitation of the normal activity of working oneself free of difficulties."<sup>36</sup>

The efforts by social movements such as suffragism and socialism to define themselves in terms of freedom is to attempt to give meaning to a static, inert quality of the external world. It is a futile attempt to mummify action, or to reduce human behavior to the landscape or atmosphere. The act of freeing is a quality of time, not space, in which the terminus is the motive that prompts the person's struggle. It is meaningless to establish a movement, a cause, or an organization that seeks to establish "freedom" as though it is a condition or a quality of space. Freedom is action and can only exist in time. There can be no fight for freedom because it is not an object. It cannot be separated from the act. The rhetoric of women's movements and labor movements that attempt to legitimate organizational hierarchies and the division of thought and action through appeals to "women's freedom" or "worker's freedom" are banalities and misstate-

ments that only encourage women and workers to “pursue their own shadow.” The “cause” is also mere atmosphere since the reference pretends to delimit or conceptualize an infinite number of actions, words, artifacts, persons, and relationships into a unified and integrated entity that has a “separate existence.” The “cause” is discourse and memory that has meaning attributed to it by observers who are usually external to the action. The “cause” exists to provide solace and protection in a place among those who “lost the instinct for action” can “amuse themselves by words.” Although all the claimants may be “fascinated by the jargon,” where individuals are taken in by the rhetoric, there are “consequences disastrous in the highest degree to themselves.”<sup>37</sup>

In the initial issue of *The Egoist*, Marsden is thoroughly an insurrectionist. She is no longer a reformist nor a revolutionary. She adopts Stirner’s concept of egoist insurrection and, at times, suggests that the insurrection of many freewomen can produce a social transformation. In contrast to the bondwomen, who trade one form of subordination for another since they become mere claimants subordinate to the cause, the movement, and the state, the freewomen “feel within us the stirrings of new powers and growing strength,” intending to constitute a “higher development in the evolution of the human race and human achievement.” Freewomen eschew protection in favor of “strenuous effort” to shoulder their own responsibilities. “They bear no grudge and claim no exception because of the greater burdens nature has made theirs. They accept them willingly, because of their added opportunity and power.”<sup>38</sup> Political actions, such as the vote, will lend only a “small quota” to this transformation because collective action addresses only the form, not the content nor the intent of liberation. The intention or the will comes from within the woman. The freewoman rejects the “protection” offered by marriage and the protection promised by the suffragist movement and the state. She must “produce within herself strength sufficient” to provide for herself and her children. She must acquire property by working, earning money, and adopting all of the incentives that propel “strenuous effort” by men—wealth, power, titles, and public honor—so that she need not solicit maintenance from any man, movement, or government. Feminist doctrine, therefore, is beset with many difficulties for women since it means a complete break the servitude of the past and cannot offer women the same guarantees of security, prosperity, and comfort. While egoist liberation is possible to the woman who asserts power and acquires property, Marsden does not expect such a transformation any time soon since her brand of feminism will not likely be accepted by “ordinary women who do not already bear in themselves the stamp of the individual.” She estimates, somewhat optimistically, that “our interpretation of the doctrine has merely to be stated clearly to be frankly rejected by, at least, three women in every four.”<sup>39</sup>

## EGOISM, ARCHISM, AND THE CRITIQUE OF ANARCHISM

Despite the effort Marsden put into the critique of culture and social movements, political theory was never far from her mind. Her three journals are replete with articles and commentary that subject political thought to an egoist perspective. She variously assails democracy, socialism, Marxism, utopianism, autocracy, militarism, and libertarianism. Her commentary on anarchism generally appeared in the exchanges she had with Tucker and Byington. By the time that Marsden authored a lengthy, systematic statement about anarchism, her journalistic confrontation with the individualist anarchists was over. After March 1914, Tucker and Byington stopped contributing to *The Egoist* because they believed, quite correctly, that Marsden had little sympathy for the type of anarchism they envisioned. They also recognized that Marsden had a completely different concept of egoism. Tucker leveled what he thought was the ultimate insult at Marsden, accusing her of being both an “egoist and archist.” Tucker’s criticism of Marsden as an “egoist” was rather ironic given his efforts to publish *The Ego and Its Own* and his putative endorsement of Stirner’s philosophy. For her part, Marsden was nonplussed by the “egoist and archist” accusation Tucker directed toward her, and adopted the labels as descriptive of her political philosophy. Early on in her exchanges with Tucker and Byington, Marsden indicated that she was in favor of anarchism if it meant the abolition of the state, but not if it meant the state would be replaced with the “subtle and far more repressive agency of conscience” to govern the behaviors of individuals.

The issue of course turns upon the point as to whether in anarchism, which is a negative term, one’s attention fixes upon the absence of a state establishment, that is the absence of one particular view of order supported by armed force with acquiescence as to its continued supremacy held by allowing to it a favored position as to defense, in the community among whom it is established; or the absence of every kind of order supported by armed force provided and maintained with the consent of the community, but the presence of that kind of order which obtains when each member of a community agrees to want only the kind of order which will not interfere with the kind of order likely to be wanted by individuals who compose the rest of the community.<sup>40</sup>

She believed that the first approach was compatible with one half of the egoistic anarchism she claimed to propound in her journals. But the second approach, which proposed a new social order based on conformity in thought, was completely antithetical to the trajectory of her philosophy. She was primarily concerned that the philosophies of Proudhon, Tucker, and the “clerico-libertarians” were attempting to create a new social regime in which cultural values and morality would become the new agents

of social control. She argues that the "archism" of armies, courts, jurists, jailers, and executioners was "light and superficial" compared to the new forms of control Proudhon, Tucker, and their colleagues planned to impose. By the end of 1913 she was content with the characterization of her philosophy as "egoist" and "archist." She was convinced that she needed to articulate the differences between anarchism and a consistent egoist philosophy of politics and the role of power in social life.

Marsden outlined her egoist or anarchist political philosophy in several issues of *The Egoist* through 1914 and 1915. Much of the discussion was clearly an attack on what she considered the contradictory, repressive, and idealistic elements in the individualist anarchism of Tucker and Byington. She also attacked the "clerico-libertarian" philosophies of Godwin, Proudhon, and Kropotkin, each of which posited philosophic absolutes as the foundation for their anarchism, much in the same way that absolutes constitute the foundation of religious systems. Marsden clearly drew inspiration and ideas from Stirner in her assault on both the state and anarchism since there are many references to the moralistic and clerical foundations of anarchism, a critique that Stirner developed against Proudhon. There are differences between Marsden and Stirner in their egoist critique of politics. Regardless of Stirner's allusion to reciprocity in his description of the union of egoists, Marsden evinces little interest in reciprocity or equal liberty, particularly if it implies a demarcation of what persons can and cannot think and do as they pursue their interests in everyday life. Further, while she does not use "ownness" as a central category, she refers continually to the individual's "own" and the proclivity to acquire and impose his or her will on the world of events.

In several essays and in her "Views and Comments" that appeared in *The Egoist* in 1914, Marsden attacks anarchism and the "libertarian creed" which converts "liberty" into a fixed idea and moralistically interprets the existence of power and domination in the world as an affront to the nature, and natural rights, of human beings.<sup>41</sup> At the outset, Marsden attacks the idea that "liberty" should be the basic concept of a political philosophy since it has no "bite" to it, matters not at all in the real world, and is nothing more than a "beautiful and ineffectual angel," parroting Matthew Arnold's critique of the anarchist poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. In everyday political rhetoric, "liberty" is the symbol that receives insincere reverence from political actors, including anarchists and libertarians, who "slip past it" at their first opportunity. The unpleasant fact of politics is that individual lives and social relationships are shaped by the imposition of power through law, which the clearest index of political will. Lives and relationships are also shaped by the equally real dynamics that challenge, resist, and evade law to blunt its most harmful consequences. "Liberty" is rhetoric used by antagonists in the political drama

to either justify the imposition of law, or to challenge, resist, and evade it. For the egoist, "liberty" is a political veil that masks a substructure of competing individual interests.

Unlike liberty, law is material and permanent. The materiality and permanence of law reveals that discussions and philosophies concerning liberty are "frivolous diversions" because they have little or no relationship to how human beings live on an everyday basis. Egoism and the pursuit of individual and group interests permeate every type of political regime and every type of social relationship. Tucker, Byington, Marsden, and all other Anglo-American individualists, of course, wrote and lived under democratic governments. Democratic regimes, especially, make it clear that law is an outward and objective expression of the interests of individuals and groups. On the negative side, law is also the repression of other interests that contradict, divert, and obstruct prevailing interests, or which are otherwise too weak to command support of the state. Under democracy, law guarantees that the power and resources of the state are applied on behalf of an "interest" which obviously has sufficient power to command it. Ignoring its alliterative and rhetorical jargon, democracy is fundamentally a regime that "quickens the pace" at which alliances between and among individuals within the state are able to impose their interests on others and defeat the interests of opponents.<sup>42</sup>

Even in a democratic regime, the representation of people is an impossibility and the claim to the contrary is simply an ideological tool to maintain social control. But the effective representation of an interest is a very real thing that can be assessed by those who own it or who oppose it. In politics, interests must be fulfilled or accomplished by political actors, or else the interests are modified or discarded, or the actors are sanctioned or discarded. Frequently, interests collide and the actors who promote them must fight it out with their adversaries both within and outside of the state. Marsden argues that it is at the interstices where interests and actors collide that "rhetoricians and moralists" like anarchists try to work in their spook of a "libertarian creed." The elevation of liberty into a fixed idea soon becomes an appeal to rights and morality. The rhetoric of politics becomes layered with moralistic concepts, such as "should," "should not," and "respect," which have little meaning in political life. Taking her cue from Tucker and the individualist anarchists she says that the basic elements of "the libertarian creed" are:

1. People have a right to protection from invasion of their interests;
2. People should respect each other's interests;
3. The liberty of each and all should be respected; and
4. Individuals should repress their interests when these are likely to interfere with another's.<sup>43</sup>



Whatever its form, anarchism, the "libertarian creed," is basically a bad dream that laments political conflict and seeks the end of the intrusion of individual interests and self-assertion in social life. It is a fantasy that, sooner or later, appeals to morality and the internal police of conscience to repress and renounce the self by "respecting" the interests of the other.

The exhortations to morality, conscience, right, and respect in the "libertarian creed" tend to favor the strong and powerful over the weak and powerless, contrary to the intentions of the anarchists. The anarchist appeals to liberty, conscience, and morality function as a form of social control by marginalizing the weak and gullible from the war of each against all.

The fact to be borne in mind is that whether one "should" or "should not," the strong natures never do. The powerful allow "respect for other's interests" to remain the exclusive foible of the weak. The tolerance they have for others' "interests rests" is not "respect" but indifference. The importance of furthering one's own interests does not leave sufficient energy really to accord much attention to those of others. It is only when others' interests thrust themselves intrusively across one's own that indifference vanishes: because they have become possible allies or obstacles. If the latter, the fundamental lack of respect swiftly defines itself.<sup>44</sup>

Part of what enables domination, or the stratification of rich and poor, powerful and weak, is that the rich and powerful have been able to convince others to renounce themselves and their interests. History and society are the domains where the rich and powerful assert and fulfill their interests while proselytizing the poor and weak about liberty, rights, and respect. History and society record little more than the "respect" the rich and powerful have for their neighbor's interests. The rich and powerful succeed because they are concerned only for the imposition of their interests wherever their whim or purpose is focused. "Their success has been proportional to the unformedness of the characters with which they have had immediately to deal."<sup>45</sup> For egoists, the decentralization and pluralism of democracy is an advantage because compulsion, the imposition of interests, can be exercised from an increased number of centers. The multiplicity of laws does not signify the oppressiveness of the state, as Proudhon, Tucker, and anarchists complain; instead it indicates the detailed channels through which interests are imposed and potentially fulfilled.

It is too vague to say that democracy represents the liberty of the people: rather one would say democracy represents the increase in the number of people who are prepared to take liberties (i.e., per persuade by personal violence), with the people who refuse assistance in the furthering of the audacious ones' interests. It is the increase in the number of those who have the courage and ingenuity to become in an open and unequivocal fashion the tyrants we all are subtly and by instinct. It is part of the trend toward human explicitness.<sup>46</sup>

In a democratic regime, liberty "is the ghostly spirit the moralists would have the meek always carry inside their waistcoats: it plays the policeman inside the man."<sup>47</sup> The "libertarian creed" of the anarchists is only able to help subjugate the poor and weak because those who can rule and dominate will rule and dominate, regardless of the preaching of the moralists. Those who do not have the strength or will to assert their interests, espouse the "gospel of liberty" as a substitute for living. Those who have wealth and power will be given more because they seek it. Those who have less, will have more taken away for the same reason. The cry for liberty and respect for rights is "hoisting of the white flag followed by an attempt to claim victory in virtue of it."<sup>48</sup>

"Archist" is just another name for the person. Until they encounter morality, the church, and self-renunciation doctrines like anarchism, each person intends to establish, maintain, protect, and extend his or her own life, identity, and interests with all available means. Marsden says that the first inclination of living human beings is to assert their own vitality and the importance of their own existence. Interest is the conceptualization of the person's assertion of their own value. Interest is the claim, assertion, and fight for a place among a myriad of other claims, assertions, and fights. Even aggression must be interpreted in light of the existential circumstances persons inhabit. The person who grows physically or intellectually is aggressive; growing life-forms are always aggressive and intrusive on the space and resources. Life guarantees that both aggression and conflict are inevitable.

We are one another's daily food. We take what we can get of what we want. We can be kept out of "territory" but not because we have a compunction about invading. Where the limiting line falls is decided in the event, turning on the will, whim, and power of those who are devoured and devourers at one and the same time. Life is feasting and conflict: that is its zest. The cry for peace is the weariness of those who are too faint-hearted to live.<sup>49</sup>

The world belongs to the archists, to those who are willing to assert themselves by valuing their lives, their growth, and their prosperity. The social world is "a bundle of interests" and a contest among those who choose to push their own outwards. Moreover, the other assesses the vitality and quality of the person by the sweep and intensity of interests she or he asserts. The more successful the person is in accomplishing goals, the more appealing she or he is to others; they excite stronger passions and evoke more intense images. The attitude of the world is friendliness toward, and admiration for, strong, bold, and successful interests because they are indicative of survival, security, growth, health, and prosperity.<sup>50</sup>

For Marsden, this is why anarchism, and all forms of "embargoism," never succeed at gaining large numbers of committed adherents. Anar-

chism is always abandoned by persons who have their wits and abilities about them because they reject placing an embargo on their ability to appropriate themselves, their relationships, and the world around them. The social world is a field where interests encounter and collide. At the encounter or collision of interests, the anarchist places a limit, or an embargo, on what can be valued and appropriated by individuals. Anarchism is constraint. Anarchism differs from statism because the embargo is self-imposed. Conscience and morality, or the internal policeman, demarcate what the individual can and cannot do, what the individual can and cannot want, value, or appropriate. Anarchism is always a form of humanism and moralism, despite its objections. Tucker's concept of equal liberty establishes moralistic constraints in the behavior of persons to ensure that the "natural and just" rights of the other are respected and protected by the individual. In individualist anarchist thought, individuals are free to pursue their own interests as long as they do not invade or intrude on the interests of others. Individualist anarchism, like all forms of humanist thought, attempts to immunize the "human" from "egoism," or the individual's pursuit of his or her interest. It attempts to insulate the "human" from "archism," or the individual's challenge to limits or boundaries. The "human" ensures that individuals can go "this far but no farther." The "human" must be protected in anarchist thought; it is the shield that confers right. Anarchism, the libertarian creed, is another form of humanism. Even in Tucker's individualist anarchism, the egoist is a lower form of life, subordinate to the human. For Marsden, Tucker's individualist anarchism is not a break from modernism, but another expression of it. Like the Christian and the socialist, the anarchist loves *humanity*, and benevolently extends the concept of "equal liberty" to encompass all. But the Christian, the socialist, and the anarchist despise *humans*, the mass of whom who reject embargoism, and embrace egoism and archism. In anarchist thought, equal liberty is the foible or opiate of the poor and weak. The ragamuffins monopolize the virtues, while the archists and egoists monopolize the world.

Marsden's critique of anarchism is in no respect a defense of the state, or an attempt to develop a philosophic legitimation of political authority. It is an antistatist alternative to anarchism. In Marsden's egoist critique of politics, the state is little more than organized coercion. She defines it as the "National Repository for Firearms and Batons Company," which is owned, directed, and exploited by "state's men" whose main task is to preserve the state's charter granted to it by the people, the chief terms of which are:

1. The state cannot be dissolved;
2. It can do no injury sufficiently serious to justify retaliation or attack;

3. It can acquire as much money from people as it deems prudent;
4. It can use any and all resources to defend its interests; and
5. It can make alliances with those who can further its interests.

Marsden does not believe that governments serve any interests other than their own, nor does she believe that they serve any higher purpose than their own reproduction. She suffers no illusions about the presumed beneficence of governments, no illusions that they meet any needs of individuals or societies, and no illusions that they can be improved. Moreover, she rejects the notion of limited government or libertarianism because no state will place an embargo on what it can and cannot do to serve its own interests or to ensure its own permanence.

Marsden differs from anarchists in that she does not think that the state can be abolished. Nor does she think that the blame for its permanence and abuse can be completely attributed to the malevolence of politicians and bureaucrats. A major part of the problem anarchists attribute to government is actually the naïveté and subservience of the subjects, which anarchism unintentionally promotes through concepts like equal liberty and a foolish fantasy of an improved future.

A modern "poor" citizen appears so unmitigatedly a fool in his attitude towards the "state" that suggests he is not merely a fool but a knave in addition. One of the awestruck crowd of toilers, who when they are not licking their wounds in jail for not minding their manners, are performing forced labor to feed and fatten those who dare to govern. . . . They dream of heaven, toil, starve and are penalized: then lisp of liberty. All the same, they seem to be able to stand it. If these things have a lesson to teach, the meek at any rate have not learned it.<sup>51</sup>

Part of the reason why governments have power is because the poor and weak fail to challenge them; they refuse to become egoists and anarchists. Echoing Stirner's comments on the proletariat, Marsden argues that the poor will cease to be poor when they refuse to be exploited by the rich and by the state. The "downtrodden" will disappear when they decide to resist. "The hungry will have bread when they take it."<sup>52</sup> The anarchists are at least partly to blame for the poor's acceptance of domination since the anarchist theory of social order includes an "embargo" on the person wanting "too much" power, autonomy, wealth, and enjoyment. Instead of attempting to "level up" by embracing egoism and anarchism, the anarchists and all other "saviors of society," insist on leveling down, reducing all desires, aspirations, motivations, and outcomes to the lowest possible level. Their ideal person is the ragamuffin. Marsden counters that "one cannot desire enough." There is no limit to individual desires, aspirations, intentions, and achievements. As a social theory, anar-

chism functions to “level down” by imposing conceptual, ethical, and political boundaries on what the poor and powerless can think and do. Marsden asserts, anarchism will not liberate the “down and outs.” They will liberate themselves through a “self-assertion” that will obliterate anarchism and the “saviors of society” who impose artificial limitations on the thoughts and actions of individuals.<sup>53</sup>

The egoist or archist opposition to anarchism is based on the notion that belief in the sanctity or legitimacy of government is gone. Also gone is the belief that government can be improved or made ethical and accountable. Without legitimacy, democratic regimes are revealed as nothing more than “individual caprice,” the first, final, and only basis of the will to govern. The anarchist notion of a harmonious society, purified of inequality and egoism is analogous to reformist ideas of “clean government,” or arguments that government can liberate the proletariat or respond to the will of the people. Governments are not neutral and they do not serve. Egoism reveals the will to govern as an ineradicable force that is expressed on an individual and a collective level. Whether it is welcome or unwelcome, the will to govern is an important form in which power inevitably expresses itself.<sup>54</sup> The anarchist opposition to the state because it is a state, is futile and delusional. For the egoist, the abolition of the state is a “negative, unending fruitless labor.” “What I want is my state: if I am not able to establish that, it is not my concern whose state is established.”<sup>55</sup> The egoist’s cause is to establish his or her “own,” to acquire and defend his or her property. Egoism does not defend an abstract master concept of social order. The egoist works to mold the world according to his or her aspirations, including power relations in everyday life. Failing to either establish his or her “own,” the egoist does not pretend that there is no state or external world at all. More powerful others will see that there is.

When one state or form of government is overthrown or disintegrates, another one arises. “The state has fallen, long live the state.” The most consistent, thorough revolutionary anarchist cannot evade the simple fact that power is an inescapable feature of life, in the face to face relationships between individuals and among large numbers of people. What happens on the day after a successful anarchist revolution? To protect the new regime, the anarchists will need to develop and implement policies, programs, and structures. The anarchistic blueprint of society and individuality must be defended. Anarchists will find themselves protecting their own interests with all the power and weapons they can acquire and use. They will necessarily have to repress the statist, egoists, and archists who will surely attempt to reassert their will and exert power over others. Anarchists will protect their revolution and whatever social formation follows it, formulating law and maintaining order through persuasion and coercion. At least, until more honest archists arrive to overthrow and supersede them.

Marsden argues that anarchists confuse the attitude that refuses to hold law, power, and authority *sacred* with the attitude that refuses to acknowledge the *existence* of law, power, and authority. All “saviors of society” tend to believe that their vision of an improved world will inevitably triumph, but the anarchists are especially prone to the confusion that saying it is so, makes it so. Egoists and anarchists do not believe that government and law are sacred, but they respect any and every law for the volume and severity of retaliatory force there is behind it. Respect for “sanctity” and respect for “power” are different. The anarchist confuses the two, believing that the elimination of the first automatically entails the elimination of the second; the egoist and anarchist dismisses the first but acknowledges the persistence of the latter.<sup>56</sup>

In concert with Stirner, Marsden’s egoism rejects the *legitimacy* or *sanctity* of existing regimes, but not their *reality*. Egoism assesses the power of the state, and challenges, confronts, and evades it as circumstances warrant. Egoism rejects any concept of utopia, or the imposition of any idea that places an embargo on how individuals can act. It rejects any final solution to the problems persons encounter in living, particularly those that pretend that force and power can be eliminated in social life. Life cannot be subordinated to an artificial blueprint because individual egoism soon asserts itself in opposition to others and to external constraints. Anarchism is an illusory path to freedom because the forces of human survival, security, and prosperity are directed in the opposite manner. Persons constantly challenge limitations and embargoes on their thought and behavior. They are unlikely to accept any regime, like anarchism, that uses ideology, conscience, and moral coercion to promote compliance and conformity. It is the nature of human beings to create, construct, and direct their will on the world of events. This will never be restrained by any ideology or cultural value that promotes a “spiritual embargo,” despite the best efforts of anarchism and other humanist ideologies.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, the anarchist is a “clerico-libertarian” who glosses over the aspirations of “a unit possessed of the instinct to dominate—even his fellow-men.”<sup>58</sup>

## DORA MARSDEN AND THE EGOIST CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

Although she bristled at the term, Marsden is arguably the most forceful “Stirnerian” among the writers and activists who were influenced by Max Stirner. Especially during the period she edited *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *The Egoist*, Marsden uses Stirner’s analytical concepts frequently. Curiously, she does not use the notions of the “unique one,” the “union of egoists,” or “ownness,” but she thoroughly developed Stirner’s concept of the “ragamuffin” and applied it in several of her cul-

tural and political critiques. She developed egoist critiques of social movements, political "rights," and alienation that were drawn from *The Ego and Its Own*. Equally significant, Marsden makes strong use of the dialectic, both as a method of argumentation in her essays and in her understanding of society and history. Whether she is writing about women's struggles or political theory, she views social thought and social process as a clash of opposites that eventually produces a "higher presupposition." Central to Marsden's use of the dialectic is the antagonism between the individual and the external world. For Marsden, the everyday world is a confrontation between the person's inclination to acquire and defend power and property, and the inclination by others to do the same. Everyday life is experienced by the person as a series of challenges or barriers that must be confronted and overcome. The struggle between self and other occurs on multiple levels that range in complexity from the individual's self-identity, to language and culture, and to political economy.

Like Stirner, Marsden also views egoism as an ensemble of resources that can help the poor and powerless in their struggle against the rich and powerful. Both Stirner and Marsden advanced egoist critiques of culture, ideology, and social movements as a way of providing the poor and powerless with the same cultural and political tools used by the rich and powerful. Lacking egoism, the poor and powerless are left with a cultural and political assault by the rich and powerful that uses ideology and coercion to promote compliance and subservience to cultural, economic, and political elites. Egoism promotes direct and ideological challenges to hierarchies of any type. It guarantees that hierarchies are unstable and tenuous because it removes all pretense that the material superiority of elites is ordained by religion, morality, or sociohistorical necessity. Moreover, it undermines all rationales for compliance and subservience, except personal expedience.

In the hands of Stirner and Marsden, egoism renders all forms of domination inherently meaningless. They are nothing but the temporary success of some persons and groups at gaining an advantage over others. Modernity is defined by the use of fixed, collective abstractions, such as "humanity" and "woman," to promote compliance and subservience. There is no humanity nor an ideal type woman. There is only the individual human being. The fixed ideas of humanity and woman are "convenient fictions" to harass and subjugate individuals. For feminists, society, family, culture, and morality become the mechanisms that subjugate women. Marsden's argument is that if women are to be free they must first assert themselves as individuals, as unique egos.

Stirner made a head feint in the direction of reconstructing social order through the notion of the union of egoists, conceptualizing reciprocity as the principle for its operation. Marsden expresses absolutely no interest in

reconciling the collision of egoists. In fact, the defining principle of her egoism is total opposition to any sort of articulation of an "embargo" on the behavior of the individual. What may be ambivalence or ambiguity in Stirner's wisp of interest in reciprocity, Marsden resolves definitively in favor of an egoism that transcends any form of embargoism and any form of ragamuffinism. Tucker's notion of "equal liberty," the linchpin of individualist anarchism, was a thoughtful attempt to reconstruct the self-other relationship in a context that is free of capitalist exploitation and governmental coercion. Marsden, however, demonstrated that equal liberty is another form of modernist thought that legitimates the dispossession of individuals. Marsden is uninterested in reconstructing social order, even less so than Stirner. She is unwilling to view egoism as a theory that has any continuity with or responsibility for a social order that might replace the one she savages. Her egoism is a pure critique of the extant society that does not envision any specific transformation or any concept of reconstructed social life. Unlike Tucker, she is an insurrectionist, not a revolutionary. The everyday problems confronting the egoist, freeing oneself from specific barriers, will be an ongoing challenge regardless of the particular social formation confronting him or her.

The emphasis on force and power in her writings is what fundamentally establishes Marsden's uniqueness as a writer and theorist. She readily admits that the logical extension of egoist thought is that it accepts and celebrates the reality that human beings are inclined to dominate or exert force on each other. This is a radical departure from the writings of Tucker, Godwin, Nozick, and almost all forms of anarchism and libertarianism which set the principle of nonaggression at the center of their world view. Governments and collectivities are assailed as enemies in anarchist and libertarian thought because they are aggressive and invasive of the individual's moral autonomy. The fundamental moral principle of anarchism and libertarianism is that individuals ought to be free from coercion, to decide for themselves how they would like to live their lives. Marsden rejects all of this as cant. It is not descriptive of how persons actually behave. Its primary consequence is to encourage the poor and powerless to embrace embargoes on their own behavior, to accept their ragamuffinhood. Coercion is another name for the world that humans actually inhabit; power, or the ability to coerce, is therefore its greatest good, its most important form of desiderata.

Marsden's coercion-based view of social life is liberatory in the sense that it encourages individuals to reject ideological constraints on their behavior, but it also has implications that Marsden did not fully explore. If egoism gives the poor and powerless access to the same tools that the rich and powerful employ to maintain their positions at the apex of the social pyramid, it also enables the poor and powerless to employ them on each other.



In other words, there is no guarantee that Marsden's egoism promotes only class conflict and resistance to the state. The implication of Marsden's egoism is that coercion and predation are universalized in human relationships. Social life can be little more than the war of each against all. No doubt that Marsden's likely response is that the war of each against all is an apt description of modern society. But this has implications that even Marsden would not likely applaud since the very young, the very old, the sick, and those who are otherwise incapacitated are not likely to fare very well in a social contest where all forms of protection and constraint are absent. Marsden recognizes that children constitute one social category that needs the protection of external agents. This is an admission that egoism, anarchism, and libertarianism have predatory consequences that not even Marsden would applaud. To the extent that Marsden's egoist thought sanctions interpersonal predation against those who cannot defend themselves, it falls short of a consistent celebration of the ego.

Dora Marsden certainly deserves to be criticized for the shortcomings in the egoism she articulated between 1911 and 1919, but she should also be appreciated for her contributions to feminist, egoist, and anarchist thought. Her political thought fills an important niche in contemporary political discourse since it expresses a very radical feminist egoism that completely transcends the traditional boundaries of the political spectrum.

## NOTES

1. For a discussion about the later years of Tucker's life see Paul Avrich, "Interview with Oriole Tucker," in *Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty* ed. Michael Coughlin, Charles Hamilton, and Mark Sullivan (St. Paul, MN: Michael Coughlin, n.d.), 20–27.

2. John Henry Mackay, *The Anarchists: A Picture of Civilization at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1891; repr., New York: Autonomedia, 1999), 70–93.

3. Dora Marsden, "Bondwomen," *The Freewoman*, November 23, 1911, 1–4. Available online at [www.i-studies.com/journal/f/freewoman/f1911\\_11\\_23.shtml](http://www.i-studies.com/journal/f/freewoman/f1911_11_23.shtml) (accessed May 3, 2010).

4. Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism, and Science* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). There is a sizeable volume of literature on Marsden, but very little of it is concerned with her philosophical relationship with Stirner and Tucker, or her contributions to egoist thought. Most of the literature on Marsden is concerned with her role in the history of feminism and her place in early modernist literature.

Clarke references Stirner several times, but displays very little interest in Stirner and how Marsden actually used *The Ego and Its Own*. Other scholarly treatments of Marsden's works that refer to Stirner's influence include Les Garner, *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: Dora Marsden, 1882–1960* (Brookfield, VT: Avebury, 1990), and *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty: Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement*,

1900–1918 (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984); Carol Barash, “Dora Marsden’s Feminism, the *Freewoman*, and the Gender Politics of Early Modernism,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 49, no. 1 (Autumn 1987): 31–56; Eugene Goodheart, *The Cult of the Ego: The Self in Modern Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Andrew Thacker, “Dora Marsden and *The Egoist*: ‘Our War Is with Words,’” *English Literature in Transition: 1880–1920* 36, no. 2 (1993): 179–96. Marsden’s thought is also discussed in some studies of the early modernist writers she worked with. An interesting example that explores the modernist concept of egoism is Jean-Michel Rabate, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

There is a significant difference between Stirner’s concept of modernity and the modernist movement in early twentieth-century literature. The former is concerned with the domination of thought and persons by fixed, abstract, collectivist constructs. The latter is a rejection of naturalism and realism in art and literature. Marsden, like Stirner, was a critic of modernity. Her journals helped promote young Anglo-American writers who would later be known as “modernists.”

5. Bernd Laska, “Dora Marsden: The ‘Stirner’ of Feminism.” Available online at [www.lsr-projekt.de/poly/enmarsden.html](http://www.lsr-projekt.de/poly/enmarsden.html) (accessed May 3, 2010). Also see Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*, 20.

6. Dora Marsden, “Views and Comments,” *The New Freewoman* 13, no. 1: n.p.

7. Brian Breman, *William Carlos Williams and the Diagnostics of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 50–53.

8. Dora Marsden, *The Definition of the Godhead* (London: Egoist, 1928); *The Mysteries of Christianity* (London: Egoist, 1930); and *The Philosophy of Time* (London: Holywell, 1955).

9. Marsden’s initial discussion about Stirner appeared in the August 8, 1912, issue of *Freewoman*. The citation for my discussion is Laska’s essay, “Dora Marsden.” Laska is highly critical of Marsden’s view of Stirner, accusing her of trivializing egoism and neglecting to use Stirner more frequently. Laska’s comments pertain to Marsden’s initial statement about Stirner, rather than the full range of discussion that occurred between 1911 and 1914. Students of Stirner should recognize where Marsden has drawn from him, even when he is not cited. My discussion demonstrates that Marsden used Stirner frequently and is indebted to him intellectually, especially from 1911 to 1914, but she also developed some new ideas about egoism. For brief discussions that are compatible with my viewpoint see Sidney Parker, “Archists, Anarchists, and Egoists,” available online at [www.i-studies.com/journal/m/m08.shtml](http://www.i-studies.com/journal/m/m08.shtml) (accessed May 3, 2010), and “The New Freewoman: Dora Marsden and Benjamin R. Tucker,” in Coughlin, Hamilton, and Sullivan, *Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty*, 149–57.

10. Laska, “Dora Marsden,” n.p.

11. Dora Marsden, “Views and Comments,” *The Egoist*, January 1, 1914, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914\\_01\\_01.shtml](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914_01_01.shtml) (accessed May 3, 2010).

12. Dora Marsden, “Views and Comments,” *The Egoist*, January 1, 1914, n.p.

13. Marsden generally combined and related these ideas in her articles and essays that appeared in the “Views and Comments” section of the three journals. Some of Marsden’s articles that discuss fixed ideas, most of which are not dis-

cussed or referenced elsewhere in this chapter, include "The Nature of Honor," *The Egoist*, November 16, 1914, n.p.; "Why We Are Moral," *The Egoist*, December 1, 1914, n.p.; "Authority: Conscience and the Offenses," *The Egoist*, August 1, 1914, n.p.; "Culture," *The Egoist*, September 1, 1914, n.p.; Skyscapes and Goodwill," *The Egoist*, January 15, 1914, n.p.; "Democracy," *The New Freewoman*, July 15, 1913, n.p.; "Views and Comments," *The New Freewoman*, October 15, 1913, n.p.; and "Views and Comments," *The New Freewoman*, January 1, 1914, n.p. These articles are available online at <http://i-studies.com/journal/index.shtml>.

14. Dora Marsden, "The Lean Kind," *New Freewoman*, June 15, 1913, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/newfreewoman/f1913\\_06\\_15.shtml](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/newfreewoman/f1913_06_15.shtml) (accessed May 3, 2010).

15. Marsden, "The Lean Kind," *New Freewoman*, June 15, 1913, n.p.

16. Dora Marsden, "Culture," *The Egoist*, September 1, 1914, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914\\_09\\_01.shtml#culture](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914_09_01.shtml#culture) (accessed May 3, 2010).

17. Marsden, "Culture," n.p.

18. Marsden, "Culture," n.p.

19. Marsden, "The Lean Kind," np.

20. Marsden, "The Lean Kind," n.p.

21. Marsden, "The Lean Kind," n.p.

22. Marsden, "The Lean Kind," n.p.

23. Marsden, "The Lean Kind," n.p.

24. Marsden, "The Lean Kind," n.p.

25. Dora Marsden, "Democracy," *The New Freewoman*, July 15, 1913, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/newfreewoman/f1913\\_07\\_15.shtml](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/newfreewoman/f1913_07_15.shtml) (accessed May 3, 2010).

26. Dora Marsden, "The Lean Kind," n.p.

27. Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*, 47–56.

28. Marsden's relationship with the WPSU leadership is discussed in Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*, 47–94. Les Garner also includes thorough discussions of Marsden and the WPSU in *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: Dora Marsden, 1882–1960* and *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty: Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1900–1918*.

29. Dora Marsden, "Views and Comments," *The Egoist*, June 15, 1914, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914\\_06\\_15.shtml#views](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914_06_15.shtml#views) (May 3, 2010).

30. Dora Marsden, "Views and Comments," *The New Freewoman*, June 15, 1913, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/newfreewoman/f1913\\_06\\_15.shtml#views](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/newfreewoman/f1913_06_15.shtml#views) (accessed May 3, 2010).

31. Marsden, "Bondwomen," n.p.

32. Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*, 58.

33. Marsden, "Bondwomen," n.p.

34. Marsden, "Bondwomen," n.p.

35. Marsden, "Bondwomen," n.p.

36. Marsden, "Views and Comments," *The New Freewoman*, June 15, 1913, n.p.

37. Marsden, "Views and Comments," *The New Freewoman*, June 15, 1913, n.p.

38. Marsden, "Bondwomen," n.p.

39. Marsden, "Bondwomen," n.p.
40. Dora Marsden, "Views and Comments," *The Egoist*, March 2, 1914, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914\\_03\\_02.shtml#views](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914_03_02.shtml#views) (accessed May 3, 2010).
41. See especially Dora Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," *The Egoist*, January 1, 1914, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914\\_01\\_01.shtml](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914_01_01.shtml) (accessed May 3, 2010). Also see Dora Marsden, "The Illusion of Anarchism," *The Egoist*, September 15, 1914, 1–6. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914\\_09\\_15.shtml#anarchism](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914_09_15.shtml#anarchism) (accessed May 3, 2010).
42. Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," n.p.
43. Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," n.p.
44. Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," n.p.
45. Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," n.p.
46. Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," n.p.
47. Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," n.p.
48. Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," n.p.
49. Marsden, "The Illusion of Anarchism," n.p.
50. Marsden, "The Illusion of Anarchism," n.p.
51. Marsden, "The Illusion of Anarchism," n.p.
52. Marsden, "Views and Comments," *The Egoist*, January 1, 1914, n.p. Available online at [http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914\\_01\\_01.shtml](http://i-studies.com/journal/f/egoist/f1914_01_01.shtml) (accessed May 3, 2010).
53. Marsden, "The Illusion of Anarchism," n.p.
54. Marsden, "Law, Liberty, and Democracy," n.p.
55. Marsden, "The Illusion of Anarchism," n.p.
56. Marsden, "The Illusion of Anarchism," n.p.
57. Marsden, "The Illusion of Anarchism," n.p.
58. Parker, "Archists, Anarchists, and Egoists," 155.



# III

## MAX STIRNER AND THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY





# Two Who Made an Insurrection: Stirner, Nietzsche, and the Revolt against Modernity

MAX STIRNER AND FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Stirner remains a marginal figure in contemporary philosophy and social thought, despite his significant influence on theorists such as Benjamin Tucker, James L. Walker, Dora Marsden, and the writers and activists associated with *Liberty* and *The Egoist*. As far as contemporary scholarship is concerned, the work of Saul Newman and Bernd Laska are scholarly efforts to establish Stirner's relevance to contemporary thought and the critique of modernity. Newman appreciates Stirner as a precursor of the development of "poststructuralist anarchism" and the "politics of postanarchism." Newman believes that Stirner is a forerunner to post-modernist and postructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Lacan. Laska is most concerned about the lack of appreciation for Stirner's work. He is also interested in the strands of Stirner's thought that he believes appear in the writings of Dora Marsden and Friedrich Nietzsche. Much of Laska's work is oriented toward the discovery of "evidence" that Stirner influenced Nietzsche.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary perspectives on the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche are considerably different from those of Stirner. Like Stirner, Nietzsche made individualism a central notion in his philosophy, creating a different form of rebellion against the collectivizing and homogenizing forces of modernity. Unlike Stirner, Nietzsche is a very well known thinker who attracts considerable interest within the academy and popular culture. Along with the Russian American novelist and political philosopher Ayn Rand, Nietzsche is the best known proponent of an individualist critique of mo-



ernity. Nietzsche is one of the most preeminent philosophers in the scholarship on philosophy in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The research literature on him is vast. There are several scholarly journals and professional associations in Europe and America that are devoted to the analysis of his thought. Many contemporary academics in Europe and America value Nietzsche's individualism as an important source of the critiques of modernity.<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche was born in 1844, the same year *The Ego and Its Own* was first published. His father and grandfather were Lutheran clergymen. In 1864 he entered Bonn University to study theology and classical philology. He dropped theology a year later, as he transferred to Leipzig University. Soon thereafter Nietzsche discovered the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer and was greatly influenced by his atheism and subjectivism. In 1868 Nietzsche met the other great influence on his early intellectual development, the composer Richard Wagner. The next year he was appointed professor of classical philology at Basel University in Switzerland and began a series of visits to the home of Richard Wagner on Lake Lucerne. He volunteered as a medical officer during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, but was quickly discharged after contracting dysentery and diphtheria. He published his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, in 1872. This was followed in 1873 with the publication of the first in a series of *Untimely Meditations* on David Strauss, Schopenhauer, and Wagner. He broke off his friendship with Wagner in 1876 and published his initial criticism of the composer in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* in 1877. In 1883 he published his masterpiece, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody*, which develops the notion of the overhuman. This was followed in 1886 by *Beyond Good and Evil*, in 1887 by *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and in 1888 by a frenzy of publishing that included *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Antichrist*, and *Ecce Homo*. In 1889 he suffered a mental breakdown that effectively ended his career as a scholar and writer. He died in 1900. Some of his unpublished writings and notes were published posthumously as *The Will to Power*.<sup>3</sup>

Beginning with the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, which appeared twenty-eight years after *The Ego and Its Own*, critics saw some striking similarities between Stirner and Nietzsche. Both were critical of collectivism, the state, morality, Christianity, humanism, and socialism. In the foreword to *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche introduces his assault on Christianity with a battle cry that could have been written by Stirner: "Reverence for oneself; love for oneself; unconditional freedom with respect to oneself."<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche was a very well-read scholar, an observation that has prompted egoists and anarchists to suggest that he would have known about *The Ego and Its Own* and possibly influenced by it.

Did Stirner's writings have any influence on Nietzsche? Is there any evidence that Nietzsche owes an intellectual debt to Stirner? Are there significant similarities in the thought of the two individualist thinkers? This chapter explores the intellectual relationship, including the similarities and differences, between Stirner and Nietzsche. The chapter argues that, while it seems curious, it is highly unlikely that Stirner had a significant influence on Nietzsche. Despite surface similarities that include a critique of modernity based on individualism, the differences in the philosophies of the two individualists are too great to comprise any sort of significant relationship.

The question of whether Nietzsche was influenced by Stirner has a long and interesting history. Part of the reason why there is interest in an intellectual "relationship," is the suspicion that Stirner and Nietzsche argue for a similar type of egoism. Some anarchists and egoists were adamant about the similarity during the "Stirner revival" at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. From the 1890s to the first couple of decades in the twentieth century, interest in Nietzsche's work expanded in Europe, Great Britain, and America. The attention Nietzsche received in the 1880s and 1890s sparked a renewed interest in Stirner among radical individualists, part of which included the search for points of convergence in the two philosophies. Tucker's *Liberty*, for example, not only introduced English-speaking individualists to the work of Stirner, it also provided the first English translations and discussions of Nietzsche in America. Tucker himself argued that his readers should appropriate ideas from Nietzsche that help make the case for anarchism and egoism, such as Nietzsche's critique of Christianity and the state. Journals such as *Egoism*, *The Egoist*, and *The Eagle and the Serpent* included enthusiastic commentary about both Nietzsche and Stirner. The title of the last of these journals is a clear reference to the hero's two animal companions in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>5</sup> Stirner's writings had been neglected, and were largely unknown, until James L. Walker and George Schumm began discussing them in the 1880s in *Egoism* and *Liberty*. Stirner's primary work was not broadly available to English-speaking audiences until 1907. At the end of the nineteenth century, neither Stirner nor Nietzsche were well-understood in the United States nor in Great Britain, except by a few scholars, as well as anarchist, atheist, and egoist intellectuals. What mattered to the individualist anarchists and egoists in fin de siècle Europe and America was the excitement that accompanied the discovery that both philosophers articulated an individualist opposition to modernity, the state, and the emergent form of monopoly capitalism. Nietzsche and Stirner espoused atheism and egoism. Both attacked capitalism and socialism. Both philosophers resisted the dispossession and downward leveling of persons that egoists and anarchists thought inherent in modernity.<sup>6</sup>

James L. Walker and Georg Simmel were among the few voices in this period who acknowledged the important differences between Stirner and Nietzsche. They cast doubt on the notion that Nietzsche's thought supported anarchism or the type of egoism that Stirner espoused. Walker said that Stirner articulated the notion of a self-liberated individual, free from law, morality, and ideological control. Stirner worked within the dialectical tradition to complete Hegel's assault on alienation. Stirner adopted a type of Hegelian view of history in which Christianity and the French Revolution are cited as critical events in the rise of modernity. Both events generated new forms of direct and ideological control. Simmel argued that Stirner eschewed the reverence for nobility that Nietzsche promoted. Stirner was a tough-minded realist, an antihumanist, and a critical thinker who outlined a philosophic and historical foundation for individual opposition to all forms of external control and measurement of the unique individual. His notion of the unique one is open to any and all who are willing to "own" their thoughts and behavior, to appropriate and consume their life for their own self-enjoyment. He despised hierarchy and objected to the treatment of laborers, children, and women. He cultivated an attitude of opposition to the rich and powerful. In contrast, Nietzsche was a humanist, poet, novelist, musician, and artist. He looked to the past for inspiration for the future; he despised Christianity as decadent and urged a renaissance of ancient Greek ideals. Nietzsche argued that systematizers and dialecticians like Hegel lack integrity. Unlike Stirner, Nietzsche approved of Feuerbach's critique of Christianity because of its humanism. Nietzsche espoused not freedom and self-ownership, but duty, harshness, creativity, and sincerity. Unlike Stirner, he was a philosopher of elitism and nobility who sought the evolution of a spiritual ideal that would transcend human weakness and mediocrity.<sup>7</sup>

### THE CONTROVERSY OVER STIRNER'S INFLUENCE

The broad interest in egoism and the notion of the "superman" in modernist literature and criticism in the early 1900s encouraged interest in, and conflated the thought of, otherwise divergent "individualist" writers and philosophers. Perhaps the most noteworthy of the efforts to equate "egoists" and "supermen" was James Huneker's study of Stendhal, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Stirner, entitled *Egoists, A Book of Supermen*.<sup>8</sup> Huneker was an American music critic who was best known for his study of Chopin. He was also proficient in the study of literature and the arts. He was one of the first to analyze and comment on Ibsen, Wagner, Nietzsche, and Stirner in English. He published a lengthy analy-

sis of Stirner in the *New York Times* in April 1907, soon after Byington's translation of *The Ego and Its Own* appeared. This early essay eventually stirred a discussion on the paper's editorial page in 1909 and became Huneker's chapter on Stirner in *Egoists*. The 1907 article clearly states Huneker's surprise at learning that Nietzsche, the poet and rhapsodist, had a forerunner in Stirner. Noting the stylistic differences, and Walker's early admonition against any equation of Stirner and Nietzsche, Huneker nevertheless makes the first case in English, in the *New York Times* no less, for a relationship between the "prophet of egoism" and the "poet of egoism." Huneker's article on Stirner and his book on egoists cemented the idea in public discourse in America and Great Britain that Nietzsche was influenced by Stirner. Huneker reports that in the 1890s he began to understand "that Nietzsche used Stirner as a springboard, a point of departure."<sup>9</sup> It is in the chapter on Nietzsche in *Egoists* where Huneker is most direct about Nietzsche's debt to Stirner. According to Huneker, Nietzsche was a philosopher who lacked "originality" and "was not one of the world's great men." His work has "the familiar ring of Max Stirner and his doctrine of the ego."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Stirner must have "imitated Nietzsche in advance"<sup>11</sup> and the "dyed-in-the-wool Nietzscheans" never acknowledge that their "master had read and digested Max Stirner's anarchistic work, *The Ego and Its Own*."<sup>12</sup>

Although it had little effect on the reception of either Nietzsche or Stirner in Great Britain and America, the question about the relationship appeared initially two decades earlier in Germany just as Nietzsche's writings were gaining renown. The arguments in favor of Stirner's influence on Nietzsche were typically based on hearsay and circumstantial evidence. In 1889, Eduard von Hartmann, the author of *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869), which discusses Stirner's ideas, publicly accused Nietzsche of plagiarizing Stirner. Hartmann's accusation was taken as significant evidence of Stirner's influence because Nietzsche had written a hostile review of Hartmann's book in the second of his *Untimely Meditations*.<sup>13</sup> Hartmann argues that Nietzsche must have known about Stirner since Nietzsche knew *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* intimately and focused his critique on the chapter that discusses Stirner. A similar accusation arose earlier in Nietzsche's career that he must have known about *The Ego and Its Own* because it is discussed in Friedrich A. Lange's 1866 book, *The History of Materialism*, another intellectual history that Nietzsche devoured in his youth. Lange's survey of materialist thought is the same book that inspired John Henry Mackay to learn the facts of Stirner's life and thought.<sup>14</sup>

Some of Nietzsche's friends also claimed that he knew about Stirner and, at a minimum, felt some affinity with the dialectical egoist. Nietzsche spent some time living with Franz and Ida Overbeck at different points

during 1880–1883. After Nietzsche’s death, Franz Overbeck confirmed the claim of Adolf Baumgartner, reportedly Nietzsche’s favorite student, that he borrowed *The Ego and Its Own* from the Basel University library on July 14, 1874, “on Nietzsche’s warmest recommendations.”<sup>15</sup> Ida Overbeck also reported that Nietzsche once mentioned his appreciation of Stirner, but then retracted his statement fearing another accusation of plagiarism. “Forget it,” he told her. “I did not want to mention it at all.”<sup>16</sup> Further, there is circumstantial evidence that Nietzsche may have discussed Stirner with his early mentor, Richard Wagner, who was certainly familiar with Stirner and knew the anarchist Michael Bakunin very well. Nietzsche was also friends with the conductor Hans von Bulow, Cosima Wagner’s first husband. Bulow was a great admirer of Stirner, probably knew him personally, and even worked with John Henry Mackay to place a memorial plaque at Stirner’s last residence in Berlin. Nietzsche and von Bulow held long conversations in Basel in 1872, exchanged gifts, and were friendly at least until 1889. The suggestion is that Nietzsche learned about Stirner from one of his strongest supporters in the arts. There is also some newer research on the “relationship” between Stirner and Nietzsche that argues that Eduard Mushacke, the father of one of Nietzsche’s school friends, had been a close friend of Stirner. Nietzsche apparently developed a friendship with the “old Mushacke.” The conversations between the two reportedly generated Nietzsche’s “initial crisis” that led to his study of Arthur Schopenhauer and, presumably, an individualist turn informed by, or inspired by, Stirner.<sup>17</sup>

Many anarchists and Stirnerites felt invested in the controversy because, if Nietzsche was influenced by Stirner, the lack of acknowledgement amounts not only to the unfair marginalization of Stirner, but is also a backhanded vindication of his ideas. Even though Stirner himself is a minor figure in the history of philosophy, the argument goes, he had more influence through Nietzsche’s philosophy than previously thought. For their part, the Nietzscheans typically dispel any argument or evidence of an influence in order to maintain the image of their master’s originality. It is important to emphasize that Nietzsche does not quote, debate, nor reference Stirner anywhere in his books or letters. Moreover, the evidence of plagiarism is either nonexistent or extremely nebulous; the accusations of plagiarism and the assertions of influence are based on perceived similarities in ideas. Although the young Nietzsche wrote during a period in which Stirner’s work was largely ignored, it is hard to believe that he would knowingly appropriate Stirner’s work thinking that scholars would not discover any deception. Plagiarism is an extremely unfair accusation to level against Nietzsche since there is no study that provides a side-by-side comparison of the ideas and passages that were supposedly appropriated from Stirner.

## ANTAGONISTIC FOUNDATIONS

If there are significant parallels in the thought of Stirner and Nietzsche, it should be possible to identify similarities in the methodological and theoretical frameworks they developed. If Stirner developed a dialectical egoist critique of modernity, then Nietzsche should have comparable views on the dialectic, egoism, and modernity. This is far from the case.

### Nietzsche and the Dialectic

From a methodological standpoint, if Nietzsche had been significantly influenced by Stirner, he should have used the dialectic to examine history, society, and knowledge. It is true that Socrates, Hegel, and Feuerbach appear prominently in Nietzsche's writings and that he had a complex perspective on all three. However, Nietzsche was clearly an enemy of the dialectic. His comments on Socrates, Hegel, and Feuerbach are ambivalent, at best. He respects Hegel's German nobility and he likes Feuerbach's atheism and humanism. But he hates Hegel's efforts at systemization, and mocks his emphasis on what humans are *becoming* instead of what they *are*. None of Nietzsche's *positive* comments on the three dialecticians has anything to do with the dialectic. The differences between Stirner and Nietzsche are the sharpest in their perspectives on Socrates and the dialectic.

Like Nietzsche, Stirner is critical of the Socratic dialectic, but unlike Nietzsche, Stirner objects to the incipient humanism in Socrates' thought. Stirner argues in *The Ego and Its Own* that Socrates' creation of ethics destroyed the particularity of individuals promoted by the Sophists. Socrates elevated an ideal concept of the universal human being. Stirner appreciates that the Socratic dialectic is subversive because it counterposes human subjectivity, or individual reason, to the prevailing rationales for social control; the Socratic dialectic unleashed critical thought against the fixed ideas of ancient Greece and antiquity generally. The Socratic dialectic promoted "a higher presupposition" in both thought and society because it challenged the prevailing ideas of antiquity and the legitimations of aristocratic domination.

Nietzsche views Socrates as decadent, not progressive, precisely because he subverted Greek culture, especially the nobility and beauty idolized by the aristocracy. *The Twilight of the Idols* includes Nietzsche's most hostile comments on Socrates and his dialectic. To begin with, Socrates was born in the lower social orders, part of the "rabble" whose "ugly" and "monstrous" face reflected a "monstrous" soul. His "dissolute character," "anarchic instincts," and resentment toward the aristocracy combined to forge the dialectic into a weapon that undermined authority and discredited prevailing values. "[T]he stupor of the logical and that barbed

malice which distinguishes him" are also evidence of Socrates' decadence. Prior to Socrates, the dialectic was repudiated in Greek culture and politics. In the hands of the Sophists, it was regarded as "a form of bad manners, one was compromised by it. Young people were warned against it. And all such presentation of one's reasons was regarded with mistrust." Socrates made the dialectic respectable; he made it a legitimate component of pedagogy and civic discourse. He was a "buffoon" who managed to get himself taken seriously. In so doing he undermined authority because it became necessary for the state and the aristocrats to provide "reasons" or justifications for their commands; authority began to crumble because the acceptance of the legitimacy of commands became dependent on the rabble.<sup>18</sup>

Socrates' attack on authority and the aristocracy was too much for Nietzsche. "What has first to have itself proved is of little value. Wherever authority is still part of accepted usage and one does not 'give reasons' but commands."<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche correctly assesses that the dialectic enables the "rabble" to (a) challenge their masters at least on an intellectual level and (b) interpret history and society in a manner that encourages the overthrow of cultural and political elites. Socrates' use of dialectics is the exemplar of both. As one of the oppressed, Socrates uses dialectic, irony, contradiction, and conflict as means of expressing resentment toward the privileged classes and fostering the revolt of the rabble. His dialectic is a ferocious "knife-thrust" into the thought of his opponents. Dialectical logic enables Socrates to take revenge on the aristocrats, conquering them and the culture they created. The dialectic is really a weapon that is used in political conquest.

As a dialectician one is in possession of a pitiless instrument; with its aid one can play the tyrant; one compromises by conquering. The dialectician leaves it to his opponent to demonstrate he is not an idiot: he enrages, he at the same time makes helpless. The dialectician *devitalizes* his opponent's intellect.<sup>20</sup>

As a political weapon, the dialectic generates mistrust, it encourages doubt, skepticism, undermines certainty. It even promotes distrust of instinct and prerational behavior. Dialectics themselves are rarely a viable route to knowledge. They are not convincing and they do not settle questions about knowledge, life, or history. Dialecticians, like Socrates, are easy to refute and have no lasting effect on discourse. At its best, the dialectic is only an "expedient," or a "last-ditch weapon in the hands of those who have no other weapon left."<sup>21</sup> Dialecticians, like Socrates, assign a prominent role to reason in history and in everyday life. Nietzsche is unhappy with that, preferring that individuals and nations be guided by their "instincts." He admonishes us that

The harshest daylight, rationality at any cost, life bright, cold, circumspect, conscious, without instinct, in opposition to the instincts, has itself been no more than a form of sickness, another form of sickness—and by no means a way back to “virtue,” to “health,” to happiness. . . . To have to combat one’s instincts—that is the formula for decadence: as long as life is ascending, happiness and instinct are one.<sup>22</sup>

Nietzsche rejects everything about the dialectic that Stirner embraces, believing that it challenges authority, instinct, and habit, the historical fetters on individual thought and action. For Stirner, the dialectic is essential to the person’s judgment and intentionality, their ability to assert ownership, or to appropriate and consume life, property, and power. Dialectic is essential to self-enjoyment.

### **Nietzsche’s Egoism**

Another important difference is apparent in the nature of the egoism of Stirner and Nietzsche. Like Stirner, Nietzsche clearly advocates for egoism and offers an organized criticism of altruistic morality in several of his books. At times, he describes himself as an “immoralist,” perhaps ironically, and applauds the contemporary value of independence, self-interest, feeling “responsible for what one intends,” and having “pride in ourselves.”<sup>23</sup> Both Stirner and Nietzsche are extremely critical of altruism, self-denial, and self-renunciation, but Nietzsche’s egoism was not based on a notion of ownness. Instead, it emerged out his inversion of the traditional ethical framework that includes notions of good and evil, and external measures of virtue. His egoism includes a consideration of the inherently selfish or self-interested nature of human action, and the logical and psychological problems associated with altruism. Nietzsche’s egoism and critique of morality is certainly a radical departure from not only altruists, but also those egoists who found morality on hedonic or utilitarian grounds. In opposition to Stirner and his progeny, Nietzsche does not advocate for the abolition of morality in favor of any form of ownness, self-ownership, or individual subjectivity. Furthermore, Nietzsche argues in favor of the use of external standards to assign value to the choices and actions of individuals. Nietzsche challenges traditional conceptions of morality, particularly the antagonism between self-interest and self-sacrifice. He argues that the self-interested actions of noble souls also serve greater purposes. Nietzsche intends to reinvent or reconstruct morality based on more heroic values.<sup>24</sup> Unlike Stirner, he does not counterpose morality with egoism, nor does he see morality as inherently inimical to the individual.

Nietzsche’s egoism is defined by three important points. First, morality poses a significant philosophic problem, but it is a cultural necessity. The



nature of morality and its uses can only be understood through its inversion; that is, by upending how people traditionally understand its concepts and purposes. Morality is necessary not because the “evil wild beast” inside humans needs to be constrained by cultural prescriptions of good and evil, but because, as tame animals, the people who populate modernity “are an ignominious spectacle and require moral disguising.” The “European disguises himself in morality because he has become sick, sickly crippled animal, who has good reasons for being ‘tame,’ because he is almost an abortion, an imperfect, weak and clumsy.” Amoral fierce beasts do not need any moral disguise, they simply act and recognize that it is their power, not their right that matters. It is the tame, the gregarious animal, the timid, mediocre modern human being that must “dress up” its mediocrity, anxiety, and ennui with morality.<sup>25</sup> The mass of humanity, what Nietzsche calls “the herd,” legitimates and dramatizes its weakness and mediocrity through morality. Ultimately, morality has little to do with universal notions of right and wrong. It does not constrain human aggression or the passions. Instead, it is a marker that separates the herd from exceptional individuals, the overhumans; it differentiates the masters from the slaves. Each social category is marked by its own morality. The most important function of egoism in Nietzsche’s philosophy is to legitimate the sense of the overhumans that they are special, not bound by the “prejudices” and rules that govern ordinary human behavior.

Second, Nietzsche’s rejection of altruism is no less adamant than Stirner’s but it has a different goal. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche says, “the feelings of devotion, self-sacrifice for one’s neighbor, the whole morality of self-denial must be questioned mercilessly and taken to court.”<sup>26</sup> In *The Gay Science*, he unequivocally states that selflessness “has no value either in heaven or on earth; the great problems all demand great love, and it is only the strong, well-rounded, secure spirits, those who have a solid basis, that are qualified for them.”<sup>27</sup> He makes clear that self-renunciation characterizes particular types of individuals and that it is a fact of life that some will dominate and others submit.

I see in many men an excessive impulse and delight in wanting to be a function; they strive after it, and have the keenest scent for all those positions in which precisely they themselves can be functions. . . . Such beings maintain themselves best when they insert themselves in an alien organism; if they do not succeed they become vexed, irritated, and eat themselves up.<sup>28</sup>

It is not necessarily a matter of virtue or ethics that some persons transform themselves into dominant creatures and subordinate others. It is simply a matter of necessity and nature. Morality, benevolence, and altruism, therefore, are a matter of perspective, “according as the stronger or the weaker feels benevolent.”<sup>29</sup> Third, Nietzsche’s egoism differentiates

between noble and petty actions, and argues that the value and, therefore, the interests of some persons are more important than others.

The value of egoism depends on the physiological value of him who possesses it: it can be very valuable, it can be worthless and contemptible. Every individual may be regarded as representing the ascending or descending line of life. When one has decided which, one has thereby established a canon for the value of his egoism. If he represents the ascending line his value is in fact extraordinary — and for the sake of the life-collective.<sup>30</sup>

If the person represents the “descending development, decay, chronic degeneration,” she or he has little value and should not be able to sponge off of the “well-constituted.” The qualities of individuals, and the egoistic choices that individuals make, have value according to the “canon” defined by “ascending life.” Thus, for Nietzsche, noble actions and the actions of the noble serve both the interest of the individual actor and a larger social and historical purpose, the ascending line of the “life-collective.”<sup>31</sup>

From a Stirnerite point of view, the problem with Nietzsche’s egoism is that it includes an assumption of an external standard, or a “canon of the ascending line of the life-collective,” that should be used to measure nobility or pettiness of actions and the importance of individuals. What is this canon and where did it come from? How can individuals know if their actions are noble or petty? How can they know which individuals are more important than others? Nietzsche’s supposition of a “canon of the ascending line of the life-collective” is nothing more than what Stirner would call a “spook.” It is a humanly constructed fiction that is attributed the appearance of an external, constraining, and absolute yardstick to assess the value of actions and persons. It fundamentally contradicts Stirner’s notion of egoism since ownness opposes the application of any external measure of value to the person’s qualities or actions. Individuals are the totality, they are not part of some mystical life-collective. Individuals are unique; they are without “norm.” Stirner’s critique of self-renunciation was based on his judgment that all forms of external measurement contradict ownness. It is impossible for individuals to own their lives, minds, and bodies if they renounce their ability to assign meaning and value to themselves, to others, and to objects in the external environment, in favor of some external canon. Egoism, ownness, the affirmation of self, entails an absolute rejection of external measures of meaning and value.

### **Nietzsche’s Critique of Modernity**

Stirner and Nietzsche are both resolute enemies of modernity, but they define modernity differently and oppose it for different reasons. Stirner equates modernity with the domination of individual thought and action

by humanist ideology. For Stirner, modernity is not a condition of nihilism nor a void of meaning. It is a condition in which the human reigns supreme. Modernity, the hegemony of the human as an ideal form was rooted in the universalist ethics created by Socrates and evolved out of Christianity, empiricism, and the political, social, and humane forms of liberalism. Modernity was fully totalized in Feuerbach's atheism which elevated "Man" to the status of the supreme being. For Stirner, the problem of modernity is not the absence of meaning or value, but the imposition of externally constructed meanings and values that inhibit individuals from contributing to the symbolic environment they inhabit.

Nietzsche also assigns atheism a pivotal role in modernity: modernity arrives as soon as humans announce "the death of god."<sup>32</sup> But in Nietzsche's thought, atheism or the proclamation that "god is dead" does not mean that humanity becomes the new supreme being. Humans confront a void that has been filled by a secularized, humanitarian Christianity, an especially decadent and weak slave morality. Modernity is devoid of meaning and value. Persons experience the nihilism of modernity. The concrete manifestations of the nihilistic condition of modernity are evident in all social institutions, including the democratic state, the economy, the church, and marriage. All are decadent, lack meaning, and too weak to regenerate or defend themselves. Modern societies, particularly in the West, have lost the "instincts" that are necessary to make social institutions strong and prosperous. The "modern spirit" includes a concept of "freedom" that encourages persons to live for today, to live very fast, and to live irresponsibly. This concept of freedom is a symbol of *décadence*. At the root of the problem of modernity is the loss of authority or the rise of the instinct of *décadence*. If there is no meaning, there can be no authority. And if there is no authority, no one willing to profess or defend social institutions, there can be no meaning. The qualities that define social institutions are

despised, hated, rejected: whenever the word "authority" is so much as heard one believes oneself in danger of a new slavery. The *décadence* in the valuating instincts of our politicians, our political parties, goes so deep that they instinctively prefer that which leads to dissolution, that which hastens the end.<sup>33</sup>

It is impossible to reverse this degeneration from the inside. Modern social institutions cannot reform or save themselves. The degeneration has to proceed, step by step further into *décadence*. It is, of course, challenged from the outside by Nietzsche's reconstruction of morality. Nietzsche's individualism was based on the philosophic conflict between master and slave moralities, an antagonism that mimics but actually inverts Hegel's lordship-bondage dialectic. In Nietzsche's view, human actions

must be assessed in terms of their proficiency, the “master morality,” and not their intentions, the “slave morality.” History and culture for Nietzsche are narrations in time and space of the conflict between the master and slave moralities. This is particularly important in modernity, because humanly constructed moralities are all that are left since the “death of god.” For Nietzsche, the master morality reflects all that is noble, strong, and powerful, while the slave morality reflects all that is weak, cowardly, timid, and petty. The master morality challenges the *décadence* of modernity, while the slave morality hastens it.

In Nietzsche’s thought, the creative energy in history and society is provided by the masters, the exceptional individuals, who intend to impose noble values on a restive populace. This differs dramatically from dialectical theory in which the creative energy in history and society is generated by the servant seeking recognition as an equal, or an autonomous subject. Historically, the master morality is reflected in the will of stronger persons, groups, and nations who impose their will, ethics, economics, and politics on others. The concept of the “will to power” is the basis for understanding human motivation and, ultimately, the formation of social institutions. Humans struggle to impose their will on the world and, inevitably, on other people. The “will to power” is important in the social development of humanity since it eventually results in the overcoming of all that is human—the creation of the *Übermensch*, or the overhuman, a being who transcends the weakness of modernity and the slave morality. Nietzsche views humanity as merely a bridge between beasts and the *overhuman*.

There is a type of parallel of the major concepts in the assault on modernity by Stirner and Nietzsche. The *unique one* and the *overhuman* are images of a subject that has overcome the alienation inherent in the person’s subjugation to the external mediation of thought and behavior in history and culture. *Ownness* and the *will to power* are both principles of thought and action that guide the subject’s opposition to alienation in history and culture. The *union of egoists* and the *master morality* are both images of the unfettered subject interacting with others who also reject the alienated conformity of modernity and who act to transcend existing relationships, roles, and expectations. Of course, these parallels are not evidence that Stirner’s writings had a significant influence on Nietzsche, nor are they evidence that the two philosophers articulate the same or similar critiques of modernity. Stirner certainly rejected any notion that the creative energy in history and society is provided solely by the masters who control the polity, economy, and culture. Stirner also rejected the notion that the goal of history, society, or individuality is the imposition of any type of morality, slave or master. Moreover, Stirner’s writings lack any sort of assertion that the “will to power” is the dynamic principle or the driver of individual behavior,

although the acquisition and consumption of power are elements of ownness. Nor would the *overhuman* be anything more than what Stirner would ridicule as a spook or fixed idea that functions only to denigrate and control the thoughts and aspirations of individuals.

The importance of a discussion that dissociates the two philosophies is manifest in the fact that the most significant interpretation and application of Stirner in political theory today is based on the highly improbable assertion that Nietzsche “was clearly influenced by [Stirner].”<sup>34</sup> The problem is that Stirner is still interpreted through the lens of Nietzsche’s critique of modernity, even by those who want to establish Stirner’s relevance to contemporary social and political theory!

Both Nietzsche and Stirner should be understood on their own terms; neither should be interpreted through the lens of the other’s thought. Stirner’s relevance today can be established only by a clear understanding of his ideas, not his ideas filtered through a Nietzschean perspective. An articulation of the similarities and dissimilarities in the ideas of Nietzsche and Stirner has more importance than the debate over Stirner’s direct influence on Nietzsche. The interest in discussing the question, beyond the value of historical accuracy, is in dissociating, not conflating, the two philosophies; the two critiques of modernity are not the same. This study of Stirner focuses on the notion of “ownness,” and its derivatives—the unique one and the union of egoists—as the central concepts in *The Ego and Its Own*. These concepts are the standards it uses to assess Stirner’s influence on Tucker, Walker, and Marsden. The same ideas, or any similar derivation of them, simply do not appear in Nietzsche’s writings. This is not a criticism of Nietzsche, nor an assertion that one philosophy is superior to the other; it is simply a recognition that the two are very different. Whatever the strengths of Nietzsche’s egoism, and whatever its parallels with Stirner’s egoism, a rendering of the differences between (a) the overhuman and the unique one, (b) the will to power and ownness, and (c) the master morality and the union of egoists, helps definitively dissociate the thought of Stirner and Nietzsche. It thereby augments an understanding of Stirner’s revolt against modernity.

### THE UNIQUE ONE MEETS THE OVERHUMAN

Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch* or overhuman is easily one of the most recognized ideas in his thought. However, it actually plays a small and somewhat vague role in the entirety of his philosophy. Nietzsche’s definition and characterization of the overhuman is also very limited. The overhuman is discussed with any depth only in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>35</sup> The overhuman is a problematic concept for understanding of Stirner and

his influence, because it has been associated with the unique one. The same body of literature that intends to establish Stirner as Nietzsche's predecessor, also tends to see the overhuman as a poetic restatement of the unique one. In addition, a significant number of the scholars who argue that there are profound differences between Stirner and Nietzsche, also see parallels between the unique one and the overhuman, arguing that the concepts are similar egoist reactions to both humanism and modernity.<sup>36</sup> But these efforts are specious, even with the scant and ambiguous information Nietzsche provides about the overhuman. About all that Nietzsche says about the overhuman is that it (a) is a collective concept, not a reference to an individual; (b) is devoid of the timidity, cowardice, and pettiness that frequently characterizes modern human beings, especially those in leadership positions; (c) aspires to warrior values of greatness and nobility; and (d) acknowledges and relishes the fact that life is risky and adventurous.<sup>37</sup> What appears to matter more than the specific qualities of the overhuman is the rationale for its coming, and what humans must do to prepare for it.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche discusses the inspirations and frustrations he experienced as he wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, thus creating the concept of the overhuman. When his health permitted in the spring and winter of 1881, Nietzsche would walk in the mornings from Rapallo on the Italian Riviera, where he was living, to Zoagli amid the pine trees. In the afternoon he would walk along the bay from Santa Margherita to Portofino. It was on these walks that the concept of Zarathustra "as a type" came to him, or, as he put it, "overtook me." To understand Zarathustra as the prophet of a great change, he suggests that one must review his concept of "great health," which he initially elaborated in *The Gay Science*. "Great health" is an acknowledgement, an appreciation, and a frustration with the intellectual journey toward discovering new goals, new values, new means, and new ideals, particularly those pertaining to human beings and their actions. The beautiful views of the Mediterranean contrasted sharply with his ill health, shaking Nietzsche with a profound agony that became a metaphor for his disgust with the values and archetypes of modernity. Nietzsche claims insight because he suffers deeply but still appreciates beauty and majesty.

After such vistas and with burning hunger in our science and conscience, how could we still be satisfied with present-day man? It may be too hard but it is inevitable that we find it difficult to remain serious when we look at his worthiest goals and hopes, and perhaps we do not even bother to look anymore.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, Nietzsche looks at "modern man." He finds the values, hopes, and lives of modern humans inadequate. When we first meet the

hero in the early pages of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he has emerged from the cave in the mountains where he has spent the past decade in isolation. He is now a transformed human, overburdened with the wisdom that he wants to bestow and distribute until the wise are once again "glad of their folly" and the poor are once again "glad of their riches." He encounters a holy man as he descends but he soon parts company, astonished to learn that the holy man has not heard that "god is dead." He comes to a crowded market in a town and dramatically announces the coming of the overhuman, telling the crowd that the overhuman is to the human what the human is to the ape. His appeal to the mob in the market is that the greatness in humanity, or in themselves, is found in the efforts of persons to lay the foundation for the arrival of this being, or ideal, that transcends the human.<sup>39</sup> "What is great in the human is that it is a bridge and not a goal: what can be loved in the human is that it is a *going-over* and a *going-under*."<sup>40</sup>

Zarathustra says that he loves the humans who sacrifice themselves for the earth so that it will one day belong to the overhuman. He loves those who "will" their "going under" so that the overhuman may live, and those who prepare a home with animals and plants so that the overhuman will have a home with the resources needed to live. Zarathustra's initial message is not only to announce the coming of the overhuman, and the overcoming of the human, but to instruct his audience in what they need to do to prepare the way for the life of the overhuman and the death of the human. This preparation involves both a "going-over" the bridge that is humanity and a "going-under" so that the human will "live no more." Individual human beings are not the overhuman and neither is Zarathustra. Zarathustra is the "herald of the lightning from the dark cloud of the human," and the lightning is the overhuman. Zarathustra's task is to rally the humans to be more than themselves by contributing to the arrival of the overhuman. Nietzsche tells us directly that Zarathustra is the promoter of a cause, which is the arrival of the overhuman, and he demands the sacrifice of the thoughts, feelings, and activity of individuals to the cause, so that they can be part of something that is more than themselves. Their purpose, the meaning of their lives, the goal they should set for humanity is to assist in the creation of something better than themselves.

As the "herald of the lightning," Nietzsche speaks through Zarathustra about the failures, limitations, and inadequacies of human beings, encouraging and applauding their "going under," their sacrifice, in favor of the overhuman. He counterposes the overhuman with "the last human," and warns his audience about the final, most despicable humans. The last humans are despicable because they have abandoned all interest in transcending the human. They no longer understand or seek to understand love or creation. They have made the earth small and petty. They have contrived happiness. They no longer challenge themselves, but seek only

comfort, warmth, and a little pleasure. They do not even realize how despicable they are. But there is still some "chaos" within the souls of humans and Zarathustra will exploit this chaos, work with the "higher humans" to bring about the overhuman. To make way for the overhuman, the human and all of the products of human folly must be overcome. Zarathustra critiques the "new idols," but this is not the critique of dialectical egoism.

The state is especially singled out for Zarathustra's wrath because it is the implacable enemy, not of the unique one, but of "peoples and herds" who have a faith and serve the cause of life. The state is the annihilator of peoples; it rules by the sword and generates a "hundred desires" in people, while "moderate poverty" should be praised. Where peoples, tribes, cultures still exist, they despise the state as an abomination against customs and morality. The state creates its own concepts of good and evil, and undermines traditional notions of customs and rights. The state generates superfluous, unnecessary persons who clamor for equality, rights, and material desiderata. It separates people from nobler values of duty, honor, and struggle because its reason for being is to provide security, rights, equality, and freedom from material deprivation. Only where the state ends is where the overhuman begins.<sup>41</sup> Zarathustra assails the political products of equality and individual rights in a similar manner. Humans are not equal and never will be. The deception of equality generates nothing but petty resentment and a desire for revenge; the deception of equality represses nobility. The overhuman will not bring equality nor individual rights, but a clash of rich and poor, the high and low so that life can overcome itself again and again. "And because it needs the heights it needs steps and opposition among steps and climbers! To climb is what life wills, and in climbing to overcome itself."<sup>42</sup>

Nietzsche's critique of politics and society is not oriented toward the overcoming of the individual's alienation from self, nor toward the individual's assertion of ownership of thought, behavior, and property. His critique is oriented toward the coming of the overhuman. Nietzsche's assault on the state, culture, religion, and science does not establish any sort of compatibility with Stirner either in form, content, or purpose. Nor does it make him an anarchist or atheist. Nietzsche attacks authority in order to recreate it. Nietzsche attacks the human abstraction, the human essence, in order to make way for the overhuman, a new abstraction, a new essence. The state, culture, religion, and science must go so that there is no competitor for the attention, trust, loyalty, and adulation due to the overhuman. Nietzsche's Zarathustra wants to rally the mob so that they can sacrifice themselves, effecting the transition to the overhuman. He is not rousing the rabble so they can make the internal and external changes needed to appropriate and consume their own lives. God and the state



must die, and so must the human, but this is so the overhuman can live. It is significant that Stirner not only counterposed the state in the abstract to the egoism, the “I,” of the unique one, but he attacked the state in its specific historical and ideological manifestations: the Greek, Roman, Christian-Germanic, liberal, socialist, and humanist. In each case, he outlined the specific form of opposition of the state to the egoism of the individual, extracting from each form the antagonism between the “cause” of the state and the “ownness” of the person. Stirner’s critique of culture, virtue, religion, and science has a similar trajectory: the historical and ideological facts are opposed to egoism, the “I,” and the unique one. They are eventually related back to the opposition between the external “cause” and the ownness of the person. Stirner’s critique of the abstraction—god, state, and humanity—was based on an objection that the essence supplanted the real, concrete individual. The overhuman is an abstraction, an essence, a spiritual ideal. It is another cause that is “more to me than myself.”

Zarathustra proclaims the downfall of modernity, conventional values, and the birth of a new era with a new morality and a new view of greatness that ordinary humans cannot envision, much less achieve. Zarathustra attacks individual humans for what they are, how they live, what they value, and what they aspire to become. They are disparaged because they do not fit the spiritual ideal of the overhuman. He announces the death of god, but does not attack the supernal and mystical expressions of human thought because he knew it would destroy any notion of the supernatural dignity of humanity as the precursor of the overhuman. He wants to resuscitate the supernatural and the mystical so that the overhuman is greeted with awe and admiration. As a supernatural and mystical being, the overhuman dominates the passions and lesser values. The overhuman forms his or her own character *ab novo*, valuing creativity above all else. The overhuman accepts that life is hard, that injustice occurs, but chooses to live without resentment or any form of pettiness. The overhuman is not motivated by everyday commerce, the necessity of meeting everyday needs, but by the opportunity for greatness and nobility.

The overhuman is the alternative to both god and humanity. Unlike god, the overhuman is not perfect. Unlike humanity, the overhuman embraces perfection as a life-goal. The overhuman struggles for perfection in a world without inherent meaning and without absolute standards. There is no meaning in life except the meaning that persons give their life. There are no standards other than those people create. Most humans—the last humans—settle for petty values and do not attempt to surpass the mediocrity and cowardice of modern life. To raise themselves above meaninglessness, mediocrity, and cowardice they must cease being merely human, all too human. They must be harsh on themselves and each other. They must be disciplined to endure deprivation with joy. They must become

creators instead of remaining mere creatures. Nietzsche says that suffering strengthens people and prepares them to overcome mediocrity and cowardice.<sup>43</sup> Harshness, suffering, and discipline are important because there is no other way to prove one's worth or to transcend modern values. The death of god is an opportunity, not a lament, because a world without god demands that humans transcend themselves. Perfectibility or improvement is the task of the overhuman made possible and necessary by the death of god. The overhuman demands more of self than human beings. The overhuman welcomes difficulties and duties in contrast to humans who demand nothing special, who seek only comfort and satiation, and fail to push themselves toward perfection.<sup>44</sup> The overhuman accepts the risks, terrors, and deprivations inherent in living, but values life without hesitation. The existence and vocation of the overhuman is dangerous. Danger reveals the destiny of persons; those who accept and confront danger transcend humanity and modernity, those who refuse to confront it are condemned to extinction.<sup>45</sup>

Other archetypes of "modern man" are equally problematic in Nietzsche's concept of the overhuman. Those who idolize the protection and security provided by the state, those who idolize acquisition and consumption, and those who refuse to challenge the Christian ideal of humanity are "worms," "mere animals," "mechanical robots;" collectively, they are a "herd." Nietzsche's criticism of modernity is a protest against the weakness, complacency, and fake civility of Christian humanism because it imposes a distorted image of what human beings can be. He demands the transcendence of humanity and modernity that will negate the entirety of Christian humanitarianism. Modern human beings must be transcended by the overhuman. The only hope is that the "higher men," those humans who can still despise themselves, as Nietzsche did during his walks along the Italian Riviera, will recognize the need for a transcendence, and assist the being who can impose some meaning on the purposeless existence of humanity.<sup>46</sup>

The "humanity" that Stirner targeted was rooted in Christianity, but it was not a Christian idea; it was the atheist idea of Feuerbach and Bauer. Stirner's conflict was not with modernity as a catalog of human failures and inadequacies, it was a fight with modernity as a social system that dispossesses persons of power and property, a culture and ideology that infuse the world with spooks, and a form of cognition and everyday behavior that converts persons into ragamuffins who welcome their dispossession. The unique one is not the overhuman and does not transcend the human. The unique one is the practicing egoist, the individual human being who owns his or her life, thoughts, and actions.

There is no external, overarching purpose for humans. There is no external, overarching meaning. Purpose and meaning are created, destroyed,

recreated, and ignored by persons continually. Nietzsche is bothered by the death of god and the lack of inherent meaning in life. He wants it recreated in the form of a new being and a new morality. For Stirner, god was not dead but resurrected as humanity. Humanity is the supreme being of modernity. Stirner objects to the imposition of meaning and purpose by culture and social institutions. Individuals can determine for themselves what matters in their lives. They can appropriate and consume what they find meaningful. Self-liberation is not a matter of discovering prefabricated meaning or waiting for the overhuman to provide it. Perfection and improvement are not measures of liberation, they are external images of how people should live, think, and behave. Ownness is a quality or the act of determining for oneself what images one will use to live; dialectical egoism is the philosophy of living without external measures of value, meaning, or purpose. It challenges the notion that harshness is better than gentleness, that duty is better than choice, that necessity is better than freedom, that perfection is better than imperfection. Stirner did not seek a new morality, a new spiritual ideal, nor a new, improved version of human collectivities. He did not disparage persons; he disparaged social systems, the state, and "the dominion of mind" for what they do to persons. Stirner rejected all supernal and mystical essences. In *The Ego and Its Own*, humanity is a "spook." The overhuman is also a spook.

### THE WILL TO POWER AND THE WILL TO ACCUMULATION

Nietzsche's use of different approaches in his writings has been both applauded and criticized. The applause typically comes from scholars who find that his mixture of organized, systematic argument with poetry and epigrammatic free association to be innovative and a pleasant break from more turgid nineteenth century philosophic prose. Moreover, it is also applauded as a stylistic manifestation of his antimodernity.<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche himself said that he mistrusted "systematizers." The "will to a system" or efforts to create organized philosophic statements based on an identifiable and coherent methodology "lack integrity."<sup>48</sup> Other scholars warn that the expression of his thought in hundreds of aphorisms creates a false sense that there is no continuity or integration of his ideas, and, thus, there is really no way to resolve his many apparently contradictory statements. As Kaufman argues, while Nietzsche seems direct and clear in his individual statements, even these must be interpreted in the context of the totality of his writings.<sup>49</sup> It is problematic to discern Nietzsche's intended meaning even in the concepts that recur in his writings. Nietzsche's method tends to encourage softening the boldness and originality of the concepts such as the overhuman and the will to power.

The problem of interpretation is not unique to Nietzsche, of course. The whole point of scholarship on classical political theory is to articulate the meaning of a theorist's ideas and defend it based on judgments about the totality of his or her work and the context in which it was written. Nietzsche's disdain for systemization makes it critical to acknowledge that his diverse approaches are part of the context and present some challenges in interpretation and comparison. Consequently, major Nietzsche scholars debate the role and importance of the "will to power" in the entirety of his thought. Some suggest that it is the notion that undergirds all of his thought; others suggest that this unnecessarily overstates its role and importance.<sup>50</sup> If the goal is to compare Nietzsche to a writer like Stirner, it is helpful to consider the position that the will to power is one of Nietzsche's signature concepts because of its perceived parallel with the notion of ownness. The concept of the will to power appears in Nietzsche's notes as early as the late 1870s, but it makes its first appearance in a published work in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In Walter Kaufman's view, the will to power is the central idea in Nietzsche's philosophy. What distinguishes Nietzsche's early work from his "final philosophy" is the inclusion of the will to power which eliminated all of the divergent tendencies in his early writings and reduced them to "mere manifestations of this basic human drive."<sup>51</sup> As it appears in his mature thought, Kaufman indicates that the will to power provides a principle that helps to unify or to provide some cohesion to Nietzsche's philosophy.

Nietzsche is fond of using the phrase "the will to . . ." In addition to "the will to power" and "the will to a system," he also speaks of "the will to truth," "the will to deception," "the will to overcome," "the will to serve," "the will to master," "the will to suffer," "the will to live," and "the will to deny reality." The "will to power" appears with such regularity in his writings that Nietzsche gives the impression that it is a core idea that helps integrate or bind whatever integration or cohesion exists in his philosophy. The book that bears the title *The Will to Power* affirms the centrality of the concept in an ironic and indirect way. *The Will to Power* was actually assembled and published posthumously by Nietzsche's sister based on manuscripts he left behind. Several sections of the book discuss the will to power. Some Nietzsche scholars do not regard *The Will to Power* to be among his most important books. The fact that the assembled materials were entitled *The Will to Power*, not by Nietzsche but by the executors of his literary estate, is nevertheless a testament to the perceived importance of the concept in his work.<sup>52</sup>

It is also an indication of the perceived importance of the role of the will in overcoming humanity and modernity in his philosophy. Significant discussions of will and the will to power appear in *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Anti-Christ*, and, his masterpiece, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche arguably provides the greatest depth in his discussion of the will to power.<sup>53</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil* is a critique of the concepts of truth and morality as they appear in philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century. It also outlines the basic elements of Nietzsche's critique of modernity. The first part of the book attacks two facets of philosophy: (a) the "prejudices of philosophers," or the practice of presenting their discoveries as absolute, objective truth; and (b) the tendency to frame philosophic problems in terms of opposites, such as "good" and "evil." Nietzsche argues that such concepts may not be opposites at all, or that they are only "foreground estimates" of a "higher and more fundamental value for life." The pretense at objectivity and absoluteness in philosophy is suspicious because "all philosophers" are "not honest enough in their work, although they all make a lot of noise when the problem of truthfulness is touched even remotely." Philosophic methods pose as rational, objective, pure, "divinely unconcerned dialectic" and purport to produce "truth," when their efforts are really assumptions, hunches, inspirations. Philosophy "baptizes" prejudices as truths, or it converts the subjective pronouncements by philosophers into positive truths that have an aura of objectivity and absoluteness. Nietzsche predicts that "new philosophers" and "new psychologists" will unmask this problem and begin to acknowledge that their discoveries are really reflections of the type of people they are. They will critically examine the practice of isolating opposites and increasingly focus on the discovery of underlying essences.

The "new philosophy" and "new psychology" will admit that all thought and all human action seek to create the world in its own image. They will discover that philosophy is a "tyrannical drive" or a "spiritual will to power" to impose an image on the world. The "will to power" underlies all life, even science, philosophy, and art. Every living thing, including the scientist, the philosopher, and the artist, seeks "above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power."<sup>54</sup> Prior to Nietzsche's articulation of this idea, the claim goes, the hedonistic philosophers who preceded him expressed egoism in terms of self-preservation. But self-preservation is only one "indirect and most frequent results" of the will to power. The will to power is the more fundamental, more important concept that includes, but transcends, self-preservation. Part of the problem is that the will itself is not well understood, but Nietzsche says that it has physical, intellectual, and emotional dimensions that comprise a totality. The will is a complex of sensations "away from" one object and "toward" another object. It is a "ruling thought" that directs attention, interest, and value; and an "affect of command" that requires obedience. "A man who wills commands something within himself that renders obedience, or that he believes renders obedience."<sup>55</sup> The will has a duality of commanding and obeying which are deceptively synthesized in the concept of "I."

The idea of will also includes an assumption, which is often false, that will and action are the same: that the act of willing produces or is linked to an intended outcome. The person who wills something tends to believe that the objective consequences of the action she or he desires are grounded in the will. The “freedom of the will” is the label that persons place on the positive feelings that acts of will enabled them to overcome obstacles. The person wills and the external world obeys. Freedom of the will is the delight one experiences in being a successful commander. Hence, the notion of power, command, and mastery are inherent in the act of willing; command and obedience are inherent in human action, thought, and feeling. For Nietzsche, the “I” is the label that individuals place on the act of willing, including all of the disregarded, erroneous conclusions, and false evaluations of the will.

Nietzsche says that the will is not only a psychological concept, it is an important part of the study of ethics or “the doctrine of the relations of supremacy under which the phenomenon of ‘life comes to be.’”<sup>56</sup> As a moral concept, the “doctrine of the will to power” means several things: (a) it is the universal driver of individual behavior; (b) there is a hierarchy of value, or a “supremacy,” of what the person wills; and (c) it structures social relationships.

### **The Will to Power as the Source of Behavior**

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche clearly establishes the idea that the will to power is an absolute, universal driver of human behavior. The concept makes its first appearance in his published work in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* when the hero proclaims the will to power as the one and only force in the cosmos that motivates all human activities and underlies all life. He says, “Where I found the living, there I found will to power,” and “Only where Life is, there too is will: though not will to life, but—so I teach you—will to power!”<sup>57</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche tells us that the world when “viewed from the inside,” according to its “intelligible character,” is the “will to power” and nothing else.<sup>58</sup> The will to power is not always manifest in the same way, but it does have common characteristics: it is the basis for the overcoming of the self and it always entails command and obedience. The will to power can be expressed in “a thousand and one goals” in as many nations, as Zarathustra says. This moral relativism, however, is both an opportunity and a problem for Zarathustra. The divergent expressions of the will to power in individuals, social institutions, and cultures means that it is also the basis for the overcoming of the human and for the coming of the overhuman. Zarathustra distinguishes between an “ancient will to power” that is concerned with defining good

and evil, or establishing once and for all absolute moral strictures for human behaviors, and “the will itself, the will to power,” the life-will, which is always overcoming itself.<sup>59</sup> This “other will” that Zarathustra promotes is oriented to the coming of the Overhuman.

The will to power includes both command and obedience. It entails both mastery and control. “What persuades the living so that it obeys and commands, and in commanding still practices obedience?”<sup>60</sup> Much of Zarathustra’s discussion about the will to power has to do with individuals “overcoming” themselves, achieving more, acting more nobly, subordinating their passions to principles, obeying internal commands to act more responsibly. But, there is also a threat that if they fail to “overcome” what they are, an external force will see that they do. “All that is living is something that obeys. And this is the second thing: whoever cannot obey himself will be commanded.”<sup>61</sup> In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche reveals that the will to power has a very specific contribution to human existence: it makes self-overcoming possible and, therefore, helps pave the way for the overhuman. The will to power is a universal driver of unthinking behavior and the life force, but it is also a dynamic that must be reined in. It is unlikely that individual humans, left to their own devices, will ever succeed in controlling the will to power. They need to overcome their human inadequacies and either assert mastery over their drives, or something like the overhuman will do it for them.

### **The Will to Power as the Standard of Value**

What humans will reflects who they are and what they value. Nietzsche places the ascetic spirit at the top of his hierarchy of values. The ascetic spirit includes self-mastery, self-control, and the subordination of the passions and whims to more important goals. The ascetic ideal gives meaning to suffering, or it demonstrates that suffering and deprivation are noble because they make it possible for some humans to achieve greatness.<sup>62</sup> The saint, artist, and philosopher are the most valuable human beings because they are the most powerful. They are the most powerful because they are willing to deprive themselves of comfort, prosperity, and security for nobler pursuits. For Nietzsche, ascetic self-torture, or self-deprivation, is the source of the greatest possible feeling of power, and therefore ranks at the top of his moral hierarchy. At the bottom of the scale is the uncultured barbarian who, torturing or depriving others, demonstrates no self-mastery and, consequently, is the least powerful. Since Nietzsche equates quantitative degrees of power with forms of behavior, power is the measure of value and the standard of morality.<sup>63</sup>

The ascetic spirit poses a conundrum for the individual: in the quest for perfection, self-mastery, and self-control, one can never have too much

power. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche says that the good is “[a]ll that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man.” The bad is “[a]ll that proceeds from weakness.” And happiness is “[t]he feeling that power *increases*—that a resistance is overcome.” What matters is not contentment, satisfaction, and enjoyment of self, but “more power.” Humans should not value peace, but war because it inures persons to hardship, deprivation, and danger. Morality and standards of human value must change in order to recognize fully the role of the will to power in human life.

Man has one terrible and fundamental wish; he desires power, and this impulse, which is called freedom, must be the longest restrained. Hence ethics has instinctively aimed at such an education as shall restrain the desire for power; thus our morality slanders the would-be tyrant, and glorifies charity, patriotism, and the ambition of the herd.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to the decadent values of Christianity, proficiency matters more than virtue because the measure of the human is the mastery of self, not compliance with an external code of behavior.<sup>65</sup> The will to power must be the most important human value because “life itself [is] instinct for growth, for continuance, for accumulation of forces, for power: where the will to power is lacking, there is decline” and decadence.<sup>66</sup> Any hierarchy of values really turns out to be a quantitative scale of how much power the individual has. Morality is the will to obtain more power. The will to power, therefore, is not just the fundamental dynamic that structures human sensations, thoughts, and feelings, it is the assurance that “more power,” or the infinite accumulation of power, is the most important human value, even transcending freedom and life itself.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Will to Power and the Self-Other Relationship**

To what extent does the will to power pertain to power over other people? Some Nietzsche scholars downplay the implication that the concept refers to power over people. Their argument is that the will to power really refers to self-development, mastery over self, or personal strength and efficacy in the world. This line of thinking suggests that Nietzsche did not intend the will to power to refer to political power. Instead, he supposedly presents it as a psychological hypothesis about the underlying force that motivates humans toward achievement and greatness in their lives. These positive outward expressions of the will to power are possible because, inwardly, individuals sublimate their desires, exert self-control, and focus their energy and skill toward the accomplishment of goals they have chosen. For instance, Nietzsche praises Caesar primarily for his self-mastery, or his command of self; his military and political conquests resulted from his ability to control his passions and manage his opportunities produc-



tively. The will to power does not mean, first and foremost, that there is an innate drive in humans to subordinate others to their will. Instead, it is a combination of sensations, thoughts, and emotions that push individuals toward significant accomplishments made possible by self-mastery.

The will to power is a universal driver of human behavior, but it does not guarantee universal results. Some individuals and some efforts succeed in self-mastery and, thus, achievements and greatness; others do not. Those who achieve great things do so by controlling frustration and refocusing their energy and talent on important goals. They appreciate the success and accomplishments of others. Those who cannot achieve will either obsess over their failures and become resentful toward those who succeed and accomplish great things, or they will continue their quest for perfection, striving to accumulate more power. The will to power is initially about self-development, a quest for perfection, and the individual's efforts to have an impact on the world, or to gratify self through an accomplishment. It also means that the acquisition of power becomes the person's primary objective: "the straight look that fixes itself exclusively on one aim, the unconditional evaluation that 'this and nothing else is necessary now.'"<sup>68</sup> The drive to accumulate more power has consequences not only for the self, but for others.

The will to power is about mastery or control of all that is external world to the will. As far as the individual is concerned, the person's passions and physical being are external to his or her convictions and choices. These must be subordinated to the nobler warrior values Nietzsche identifies. There are no boundaries that restrain the will to power or the person's mastery over externality. The lack of limits means that the will to power is limitless; its legitimate purview extends beyond mastery of the self and the body, it extends to the person's interaction with others.

We exercise our power over others by doing them good or by doing them ill—that is all we care for! Doing ill to those on whom we have to make our power felt; for pain is far more sensitive means for that purpose than pleasure: pain always asks concerning the cause, while pleasure is inclined to keep within itself and not look backward. Doing good and being kind to those who are in any way already dependent on us (that is, who are accustomed to think of us as their *raison d'être*): we want to increase their power because we thus increase our own; or we want to show them the advantage there is in being in our power—thus they become more contented with their position, and more hostile to the enemies of our power and readier to contend with them.<sup>69</sup>

While the will to power initially refers to the individual's mastery of self, it does not stop there. It has a social component. Nietzsche clearly means that the will to power exists among the powerful and among the

powerless. The implication is that the “powerful” and “powerless” both want power and that they differ in terms of how much they have. Power and powerlessness are relative terms based on an external measure of how much power individuals possess. Power is also based on the mastery of others, not just the mastery of oneself. Zarathustra reveals as much when he says, “even in the will of one who serves I found a will to be master” and “[t]hat the weaker should serve the stronger, of this it is persuaded by its will, which would be master over what is weaker still: this pleasure alone it does not gladly forgo.”<sup>70</sup> Power has an external measure: the power of one over another.

The will to power is directed toward mastery, command, and obedience in regard to the individual’s relationship with self and in regard to the individual’s relationship with others. It is important to acknowledge that the will to power has a social dimension to it. Nietzsche states in several places the idea that some persons are more powerful than others and that individuals seek to have power over others. He even states that the will to power is expressed in institutionalized power relations, particularly in the state. From a Stirnerite point of view, there is no shame in this. Certainly, one of the aspects of ownness is the will to power, although Stirner does not use that phrase. Stirner is also quite clear on the point that the effort to impose one’s will on the world and on other people is inherent in life and important if individuals are to own themselves. Marsden developed this idea most forcefully among the intellectuals influenced by Stirner.

In Stirner’s thought, ownness cannot be reduced to Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power. Ownness is also a “will to property” and a “will to self-enjoyment.” The owner or the unique one not only seeks the acquisition and consumption of power, mastery over self and others, but also the acquisition and consumption of property and self-enjoyment. The unique one rejects the idea that the individual must pursue the infinite accumulation of power or the ceaseless pursuit of perfection in any form. Stirner’s critique of capitalism included the objection to the prohibition on consuming and enjoying products, time, and achievements. Accumulation of property or power for the sake of accumulation is anathema to the unique one. What matters to the unique one is the consumption of life, objects, time, and relationships with others. Power and property are not ends in themselves, but are tools for the individual’s self-enjoyment. As such, they are subordinate to the person’s ownership. Neither power nor property has a status that is autonomous to the person’s act of ownership. The will to self-enjoyment imposes limits on the will to power and property. The infinite accumulation of power and property negates the consumption and enjoyment of life. Stirner’s concept of ownness contradicts Nietzsche’s notion of the ascetic spirit. Nietzsche would likely consider the pursuit of property and self-enjoyment as barbaric and uncultured. The unique one is unimpressed

because, in opposition to Nietzsche, ownness means that the person rejects the external imposition of any scale of values. The meaning and value of property and culture is a task for the individual to work out. Any attempt to equate Nietzsche's notion of the will to power with Stirner's ownness inevitably distorts one or both of these ideas.

## NIETZSCHE'S REVOLT AGAINST MODERNITY

Perhaps one of Nietzsche's most important philosophic contributions is his notion of "nihilism." Nihilism is a solemn and dangerous word which implies a threat to both individual experience and the collective life of persons. While humanism, or the supremacy of the human, was the starting point for Stirner's egoistic rebellion, nihilism is the starting point for Nietzsche's rebellion against modernity. Nietzsche describes nihilism as the "gruesome guest" that is the primary descriptor of modernity. Nihilism has social and cultural characteristics, as well as historical origins. It also has implications as individuals attempt to navigate and interpret their everyday experiences.

Culturally, nihilism refers to a circumstance in which the "highest values are losing their value." Morality is in doubt. It is the "downfall of the moral interpretation of the universe" and a resistance to the attribution of moral qualities to the external world. It is a condition in which there is no answer to the question: "to what purpose?"<sup>71</sup> From the perspective of the individual, nihilism is a sense of purposelessness and meaninglessness, a sense that things lack value and make little sense. As Nietzsche describes modernity in *The Will to Power*, "We have ceased from attaching any worth to what we know, and we dare not attach any more worth to that with which we would fain deceive ourselves—from this antagonism there is a process of dissolution."<sup>72</sup> Nihilism is the notion that there are no values and no purpose. It also includes the idea that there is no certainty in knowledge; nothing is really known. There is no truth, no purpose, and no standard of value. Consequently, the strong and powerful are the arbiters of truth, purpose and value.

That there is no truth; that there is no absolute state of affairs—"no thing in itself." This alone is nihilism, and of the most extreme kind. It finds that the value of things consists precisely in the fact that these values are not real and never have been real, but that they are only a symptom of strength on the part of the valuer, a simplification serving the purposes of existence.<sup>73</sup>

Nihilism is the theory and practice of expunging truth, purpose, and value from culture, society, and individuality. Ultimately, nihilism is the condition in which moral valuations themselves are reduced to condem-

nations, morality is “the abdication of the will to live.”<sup>74</sup> Nihilism is the rationale for *décadence*, the logic of modernity. Nihilism is not mere pessimism since the latter is disillusionment with specific circumstances. Nihilism is a much more serious disillusionment; it is disillusionment with the world and existence as such.<sup>75</sup>

Nietzsche identifies two historical sources of nihilism: Christianity and science. Christianity is a source of nihilism because its faith in a man who became a god invited a disdain for the material world people inhabit in favor of a world of fictions. Christian morality is nihilistic because it degrades human beings as they really exist and celebrates humanity as a fantasy. In Christianity, the dignity of human beings is established by god. Christianity, therefore, creates an “overvaluation” of humanity that will have disastrous consequences.

The time is coming when we shall have to pay for having been Christians for two thousand years: we are losing the equilibrium which enables us to live—for a long while we shall not know in what direction we are traveling. We are hurling ourselves headlong into the opposite valuations, with that degree which could only have been engendered in man by an overvaluation of himself.<sup>76</sup>

Christianity made faith in god unstable, it disrupted the “equilibrium which enables us to live,” because it equated god with a man. The contradiction of Christianity is that it demands faith in a man who became a god, but its morality demeans real men! How can people be expected to maintain their faith in the divinity of a demeaned being? Christianity prompted nihilism because it unwittingly undermined faith in the absolute.

Faith in god was replaced with faith in science and reason. Science and reason attempt to refute religious myth with facts, but they prove to be another body of myths and prejudices that also denigrate the human. In some ways, science is worse than Christianity, or it is more important than Christianity in laying the foundation for nihilism. Science undermined the dignity religion attributes to humanity by arguing that human existence is an accident; the purposelessness and meaninglessness of human existence is inherent, it is built into the cosmos. The scientific and rational theft of human purpose and value only reinforces and contributes to the negation of human dignity that results from the projection of human power onto god.<sup>77</sup> Science and reason also have epistemological dimensions that contribute to nihilism and *décadence*. Kant destroyed the fundamental unity in scientific and rational inquiry by forever separating the noumenal and phenomenal worlds, the “thing-in-itself” and the “thing-as-experience.” Nietzsche knew that the philosophers following Kant, including Hegel, could not reconcile the noumenal and phenomenal worlds except by reconstituting faith as the bridge between the two. With

the noumenal and phenomenal alienated forever, the value of human life would be measured "according to categories which can only be applied to a purely fictitious world."<sup>78</sup> Science and reason can only tell us things about the phenomenal world, the world created by science and reason. Religion and science both leave human beings without access to knowledge about the world they inhabit.

Nihilism has earthly, societal, everyday causes and consequences as well. It affects all social institutions and all forms of human interactions. Nihilism is the social and cultural reality of modernity. Its social and cultural traits include:

1. Philosophy and the natural sciences become characterized by theories and measures that reinforce purposelessness, unintentional causality, mechanism, conformity to natural law;
2. In politics, individuals abandon beliefs in their own rights and innocence. Falsehoods ensure order and encourage worship of temporary regimes and causes;
3. In political economy, slavery is abolished, as is every possibility of a "redeeming class," that can justify authority and order;
4. In history, human experience is reduced to fatalism and Darwinian concepts of natural selection in which success and failure are assumed to occur by chance;
5. In culture, all attempts at reconciling reason and faith are abandoned;
6. In psychology, "biographies can no longer be endured!" Individual qualities no longer matter; character is regarded as a mask; and
7. In art, romanticism is regarded with repugnance and beauty is redefined as pessimistic "truthfulness."<sup>79</sup>

Among the social causes of nihilism is the lack of a "higher species" whose power and charisma would "uphold our belief in man." The "inferior species," which Nietzsche parenthetically identifies as the "mass" or the "herd," forgets its "modesty, and inflates its needs into cosmic and metaphysical values." The mass, the herd consequently vulgarizes all life, tyrannizing over exceptional individuals, so that even these persons lose belief in themselves and others.<sup>80</sup> Individuals are confronted with three basic choices about how they adapt to the decadence. First, they can seek some sort of earthly solution to the problem of life in a social movement that promises the "final triumph of truth, love, justice, socialism, equality of persons." Second, they can recommit themselves to the fiction of self-renunciation, display contempt for desires and the ego, elevating altruism, self-sacrifice and the denial of will above all other possible values. Third, they can recommit themselves to a metaphysical interpretation of their lives which attributes divine guidance to their experiences. This op-

tion, of course, largely encourages the church to meddle in all aspects of the life of the individual.<sup>81</sup>

Nietzsche recognizes that the second and third options are, in modernity, fantasies. They are merely adaptations that hold little possibility for individuals or groups to respond to nihilism in any way that helps them regain a sense of dignity, meaning, or purpose. The first option, however, is a thoroughly modernist response that, consequently, attracts many adherents. It is best typified by socialism and socialist movements. But Nietzsche condemns socialism in no uncertain terms primarily because it prolongs the artifice of nihilism through slogans like “progress,” “justice,” and “equality,” which are destined only to generate more disillusionment.

It is disgraceful on the part of socialist-theorists to argue that circumstances and social combinations could be devised which would put an end to all vice, illness, crime, prostitution, and poverty. . . . [T]hat is tantamount to condemning life . . . a society is not at liberty to remain young. And even in its prime it must bring forth ordure and decaying matter. The more energetically and daringly it advances, the richer will it be in failures and in deformities, and the nearer it will be to its fall. Age is not deferred by means of institutions. Nor is illness. Nor is vice.<sup>82</sup>

The theories that attempt to lay a rational or scientific basis for socialism, such as sociology, are themselves only exercises in decadence. “[A]ll our sociology is a proof of this proposition, and it has yet to be reproached with the fact that it has only the experience of society in the process of decay, and inevitably takes its own decaying instincts as the basis of sociological judgment.”<sup>83</sup> The theory of equality, compliance, and dispossession is itself flawed and antilife. To possess and to wish to possess more is growth, or life itself. “In the teaching of socialism ‘a will to the denial of life’ is but poorly concealed: botched men and races they must be who have devised a teaching of this sort.”<sup>84</sup> The socialist movement is a tyranny of the superficial, the envious, the meanest, and “most brainless.” It is “the logical conclusion of ‘modern ideas’ and their latent anarchy.” The “democracy” and collectivism it promotes produces a genial form of paralysis that prevents any sort of accomplishment at all. It is an institutionalized political movement that ignores or displaces the values of equality and justice in favor of order and compliance. People follow it, but not for the nascent reasons that attracted them. Socialism and other movements like it, are “a hopelessly bitter affair: and there is nothing more amusing than to observe the discord between the poisonous and desperate faces of present-day socialists—and what wretched and nonsensical feelings does not their style reveal to us!”<sup>85</sup>

Socialism is the apex of modernist adaptations to nihilism. It is a theory and movement that expresses the slave morality most clearly in the mod-

ern era, insisting that persons are perpetually oppressed, inherently victims of external circumstances. The “longing for freedom, the instinct for happiness, and the subtleties of the feeling of freedom” are inefficacious sentiments and political “banners” that fail to produce changes in people’s lives, but which also express an alternative vision of morality. However, it is a vision of “the good” that is rooted in resentment and envy. It encourages invidious comparisons with others and promotes hostility toward those who have more. It is an angry lament that individuals cannot master their own lives and experiences, a “vengeful cunning of impotence.” The slave morality insists that persons cannot live their lives without intervention by external agents. Socialism entails a moral demand that “strength not show itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs.” “The good” that the slave morality promotes is a weak, diffident creature “who harms nobody, who does not attack, who does not requite.” Socialism’s critique of capitalism is a fundamentally disgraceful moral directive that seeks reprisals against the successful, intending to tame the “beast of prey.”<sup>86</sup>

As Nietzsche sees it, socialism, democracy, religious humanitarianism—all forms of the slave morality—are not viable alternatives to nihilism and modernity. They are expressions of nihilism and modernity. Nihilism can be understood as potentially indicative of the final and complete dissolution of individuality and culture; a complete downfall and an aversion to existence; a backward-looking rationale for decadence that implies nothing about the future. It can also be understood as a recognition of degeneration and also a commitment to an altered way of life, or a forward-looking clarion for individual and cultural renewal. Zarathustra never states whether he came to pronounce the end or a new beginning. In all probability, Nietzsche’s thought is both. It offers insight into yesterday and tomorrow.<sup>87</sup> *The Will to Power* makes it clear that Nietzsche does not celebrate nihilism. In fact, he recoils in horror at what nihilism means and what it portends for individuals, culture, and society over the impending two centuries.

I teach people to say Nay in the face of all that makes for weakness and exhaustion. I teach people to say Yea in the face of all that makes for strength, that preserves strength, and justifies the feeling of strength.<sup>88</sup>

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* encourages those who would destroy traditional values and relationships, but Zarathustra intends to clear the way for the overhuman and the new values and relationships it will bring. Nietzsche’s encouragements to accelerate the destruction of traditional values and relationships is only intended to accelerate their replacement with new values and relationships. The nihilism of modernity will be replaced with something else. Zarathustra wants to destroy in order to make things bet-

ter, to reverse the decadence inherent in Christianity, socialism, democracy, and modern science. Does Nietzsche provide us with any guidance about what is to replace nihilism or how this change is to occur either at the level of individuals or at the cultural level?

One suggestion Nietzsche offers is a return to the “master morality,” or at least an attempt to recapture a sense of the values of nobility.<sup>89</sup> Nietzsche says that in all of his studies of morality in human history two basic types appear with regularity—the master morality and the slave morality. The master morality or, as Nietzsche also calls it, the noble morality, is not the morality of modernity. It is hard for people to empathize with the master morality in modern culture and “hard to dig up and recover” because it has been discarded for so long. Nietzsche’s writings are replete with references to the warrior values of strength, endurance, severity, and nobility. Initial references to the values of nobility or to the “noble soul” appear in *Human, All Too Human* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. More detailed discussions of the master morality are included in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*.<sup>90</sup> The master morality dominates when the ruling group of aristocrats has the ability to impose a definition of “the good” on individuals and society; the master morality is the ideology of the “aristocratic commonwealth.” When this happens, the “exalted, proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinction and determining the order of rank.”<sup>91</sup>

Unlike the slave morality, the master morality is value-creating. The masters themselves, or the noble souls, determine what is valuable. They judge value and purpose. They do not need external approval or intervention. The noble morality does not pretend to apply ethical standards universally. It rejects all categorical imperatives. It emphasizes the importance of reciprocity, but this only applies to peers. Noble souls may behave as they please against “beings” of a lower rank and against everything alien. Noble souls are beyond “good and evil” and they reject any sort of valuation that denigrates their success, excellence, strength, and courage. Noble souls have nothing but contempt for “the cowardly, the anxious, the petty, those intent on narrow utility; also for the suspicious with their unfree glances, those who humble themselves.” The master morality is the worldview, or the “fundamental faith,” of aristocrats. It glorifies itself and the social groups associated with it. The domination of culture by Christian ethics for the past two thousand years makes it extremely unlikely that any social group would pursue a return to the master morality. Humanity is too far gone.

The other suggestion Nietzsche offers is that individuals can adopt “ascetic ideals.” In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche not only charts the historical development of the master and slave moralities, he identifies the thoughts and actions of the “ascetic priest,” an archetype of asceticism who individually adopts the values of strength, heroism, and self-mastery. Nietzsche describes this asceticism as “severe and cheerful continence



with the best will, belongs to the most favorable conditions of supreme spirituality."<sup>92</sup> In opposition to the "hubris and godlessness" of modernity, the ascetic priest seeks to impose on life a definite set of virtues that includes modesty, valuation, courage, severity, integrity, and seriousness. The ascetic priest fights for his existence against those who deny these ideals, knowing that "the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life."<sup>93</sup> The ascetic ideal is something of an apparent paradox since its purpose is to protect life in a degenerating set of circumstances through the artifice of self-denial, deprivation, and sacrifice for a higher ideal. The ascetic ideal is a paradox only at the level of appearance. The ascetic priest denies life, or the robust enjoyment of life, in order to preserve its value against the weakness and antilife thoughts and behaviors of the slave morality. The ascetic priest keeps the concrete elements of the master morality alive in a hostile cultural environment.

Löwith concludes his study of nineteenth-century philosophy with the observation that Nietzsche's notions of ascetic ideals demonstrate that he never really provided a philosophic alternative to the bourgeois-Christian world; he never really outgrew the Christianity of his childhood. The ascetic ideal, Nietzsche's individualist response to modernity, "is an avowed substitute for religion; no less than Kierkegaard's Christian paradox, it is an escape from despair: an attempt to leave "nothing" and arrive at "something."<sup>94</sup> Regardless of Nietzsche's relationship to Christianity, he rejects only one form of morality: the weak, unctuous, slave morality he associates with Christianity, socialism, democracy, and modernity. In contrast to Stirner's sharp admonition against the external measurement and assessment of the thoughts and behaviors of unique individuals, Nietzsche does not reject morality in its entirety. He does not reject the measurement of the thought and actions of individuals against external yardsticks. He rejects the decadent form of morality that defines modernity. He despises its apologists. Beyond the ascetic ideal, he does not provide much of an alternative. He remains spiritual in his opposition to modernity.

Stirner opposed all forms of external measurement with ownness. He opposed the prevailing collectivist notions about revolution and political change because they are only the instruments of humanism. He provided an alternative vision that suggests how individuals can live their lives in opposition to modernity and all externally imposed morality. Stirner recognized that the disobedience of large numbers of individuals can produce the collapse of social and cultural systems. Stirner's egoist insurrection is also a form of revolutionary thought that seeks the overthrow of modernity, or "the dominion of the mind." Despite all of his dissidence and approval of egoism, Nietzsche's philosophy never really provides a vision for the same sort of alternative. He wants to overcome nihilism, not the "dominion of mind." This is a radically different task. For Nietzsche, "[a]ll the sciences

have from now on to prepare the way for the future task of the philosophers: this task understood as the solution of the problem of value, the determination of the order of rank among values."<sup>95</sup> Nietzsche advances a type of insurrection against modernity, but it is not an egoist challenge to the power and authority of fixed ideas. It is not an egoist argument for individuals who intend to reinvent their lives. Nietzsche's goal is to replace one set of fixed ideas with another. Nietzsche offers a prepackaged array of virtues to those who accept his critique of modernity and the slave morality responses to it. Stirner and Nietzsche differ at a very fundamental level in what constitutes modernity and why it is a problem. As a result, they differ radically on the options open to persons who intend to assert ownership and control over their bodies, minds, and selves.

## NOTES

1. Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 55–74, and Bernd A. Laska, "Nietzsche's Initial Crisis: New Light on the Stirner/Nietzsche Question," *Germanic Notes and Reviews* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 109–33.

2. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* and *The Objective Standard* are two independent scholarly journals that explore Rand's thought. Although Rand is a fascinating egoist thinker, she is not included in this study because there is no evidence that she was influenced by Stirner or that his philosophy parallels her in any significant way. Rand refers to Stirner only once. She incorrectly identifies Stirner as a subjective idealist. Ayn Rand, *The Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 176. For an interesting discussion of Nietzsche's importance and a plea for his inclusion in the "sociological canon," see Robert J. Antonio, "Nietzsche's Antisociology: Subjectified Culture and the End of History," *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (July 1995): 1–43. Evidence of the contemporary philosophic interest in Nietzsche abounds. There are two academic journals in the United States alone devoted exclusively to Nietzsche's thought, *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* and *New Nietzsche Studies*. The University of Illinois Press has an entire series of books focused on Nietzsche. There are no fewer than fourteen scholarly associations in Europe and America that study Nietzsche. There are also special interest groups focused on Nietzsche within academic philosophic associations. Moreover, Nietzsche is frequently discussed as a precursor to critical and postmodern theory. Postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers are occasionally referred to as the "Nietzschean left."

3. Walter Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950): 21–71.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Antichrist* (1889/1895; repr., London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 125.

5. Wendy McElroy, *The Debates of Liberty* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 1, 11. The first published discussion of Nietzsche in the United States appeared in *Liberty*. It was a translation by Benjamin Tucker of an article that originally appeared in *Le Figaro*. T. de Wyzewa, "Nietzsche's Zarathustra," *Liberty*,

October 1, 1892, 1. The first translations of Nietzsche by George Schumm were excerpts from *The Gay Science* and *Human, All Too Human* both of which discussed Nietzsche's critique of morality and rights. It is entirely understandable that a reader of these excerpts, who was familiar with some of Stirner's ideas through secondary sources, would conclude that there is a great similarity between the two philosophers. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Extracts from the Works of Nietzsche," *Liberty*, December 17, 1892, 1, 4.

6. Walker read both Nietzsche and Stirner in the original German and concluded early on that the two philosophers were very different. See James L. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism* (Denver, CO: Katherine Walker, 1905), 65–67. Walker rejected Nietzsche's adoration of the aristocracy and his comments about women as especially inconsistent with Stirner's form of egoism.

7. Walker, *The Philosophy of Egoism*, 65–67; Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (1907; repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 162.

8. James Huneker, *Egoists, A Book of Supermen* (New York: Scribner's, 1909), 236–68.

9. James Huneker, "Ideas of Max Stirner," *New York Times*, April 20, 1907, n.p. Also see "Egoists or Supermen," *New York Times*, April 3, 1909, n.p.

10. Huneker, *Egoists*, 246.

11. Huneker, *Egoists*, 257.

12. Huneker, *Egoists*, 259.

13. The accusations against Nietzsche and the issues pertaining to his "relationship" with Stirner were explored in a systematic fashion as early as 1904. See Albert Lévy, *Stirner et Nietzsche* (Paris: Société Nouvelle de Librairie et d'Édition, 1904). Lévy refutes arguments that Stirner influenced Nietzsche and that the two philosophies are compatible versions of egoism. For a detailed argument that Stirner was Nietzsche's predecessor see Bernd A. Laska, "Nietzsche's Initial Crisis: New Light on the Stirner/Nietzsche Question," *Germanic Notes and Reviews* 33 (Fall 2002): 109–33. Laska is very pro-Stirner and is committed to demonstrating the relationship between the two philosophers because it would be a vindication of Stirner and a step toward giving Stirner the acclaim he deserves in contemporary thought. Laska has done an admirable job of researching the matter. However, the evidence he discovers is still very thin. It is circumstantial evidence and does not demonstrate any relationship that is concrete.

14. Lévy, *Stirner et Nietzsche*, 10.

15. Thomas Brojer, "Philologica: A Possible Solution to the Stirner-Nietzsche Question," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 25 (Spring 2003): 109–14.

16. Laska, "Nietzsche's Initial Crisis," 109–33.

17. Laska, "Nietzsche's Initial Crisis," 109–33.

18. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 40–44; Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 83–86.

19. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 41.

20. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 42.

21. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 42.

22. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 44.

23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble, 2008), 99.

24. Robert Solomon, *From Hegel to Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 105.
25. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 187.
26. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (1886; repr., New York: Modern Library Edition, 1992), 179–435.
27. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 177–78.
28. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 100.
29. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 99.
30. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 97.
31. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said* (New York: Random House, 2000), 39.
32. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 104–6; *The Antichrist*, 127–30.
33. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 105.
34. Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan*, 56. Newman's perspective on the issue of Stirner's influence is regrettable since he is otherwise on to something important about Stirner's role in postmodern thought. Newman fails to give any evidence at all about Stirner's putative influence on Nietzsche.
35. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody* (1883; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
36. Laska, "Nietzsche's Initial Crisis," 109–14; Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 316–8, 321–25; Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan*, 56; and Patterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist Max Stirner*, 152–55.
37. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 11–16, 43–45, 49, 73, 87.
38. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo, or How to Become What One Is*, in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (1908; repr., New York: Modern Library Edition, 1992), 755.
39. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 9–22.
40. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 13–14.
41. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 43–45.
42. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 87.
43. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/Antichrist*, 33.
44. José Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the Masses* (1929; repr., New York: Norton, 1964), 11–18.
45. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 17–18.
46. Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 321–25.
47. Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 83–86; Solomon and Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, 49–50.
48. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 35.
49. Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 72; also see Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 192–93.
50. Contrast what Walter Kaufman says in *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 178, with what Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins say in *What Nietzsche Really Said*, 215–22.
51. Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 178.
52. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (1906; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble, 2006).
53. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 179–435.
54. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 202–3.

55. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 216.
56. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 216.
57. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 100.
58. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 36.
59. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 100.
60. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 99–100.
61. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 99–100.
62. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic in The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (1887; repr., New York: Modern Library Edition, 1992), 598.
63. Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 196.
64. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 343.
65. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 127–28.
66. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 129–39.
67. Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 196.
68. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 215.
69. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 29.
70. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 99.
71. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 3–5.
72. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 6.
73. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 10.
74. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 7.
75. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 17.
76. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 14.
77. Solomon and Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, 97.
78. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 9. Also see Welsh, “The Unchained Dialectic,” 228–33.
79. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 39.
80. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 20.
81. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 15–16.
82. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 20.
83. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 27.
84. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 61–62.
85. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 61.
86. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 481–82.
87. Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 190.
88. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 27.
89. Robert C. Solomon, *From Hegel to Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 118.
90. The most detailed discussions of the master and slave moralities appear in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 394–427, and Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 460–92.
91. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 394.
92. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 548.
93. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 556.
94. Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 373.
95. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 492.



## Dialectical Egoism: Elements of a Theoretical Framework

Since the end of Dora Marsden's career as an egoist writer, the scholarship on Stirner largely failed to examine *The Ego and Its Own* as an independent and coherent theoretical statement that contributes to the analysis of modernity. The tendency is to interpret Stirner as a marginal figure in the origins of Marxism, particularly since the Stalinists elevated Marx and Engels's critique of Stirner in *The German Ideology* as absolute truth. What is missing in the scholarship on Stirner is an effort to interpret his thought as an organized theoretical framework. This is due in part to Stirner himself and the basic concepts in his thought, which emphasize the uniqueness of persons and their interpretation of the sociohistorical context. Unlike Marxism, functionalism, postmodernism, and existentialism, Stirner's dialectical egoism never developed a social or academic movement intending to propound its ideals and promote itself as a social cause. Any attempt to develop dialectical egoism as a social or academic movement is contradictory to Stirner's primary goal of elevating the ideas and interests of individuals above the conceptual plane of social institutions, movements, or "causes" of any sort.

The idea that dialectical egoism is a "cause" is inherently contradictory. This helps to explain why Stirnerite writers such as James L. Walker, Dora Marsden, and Benjamin Tucker were more interested in differentiating their views of the world from others, than were in building conceptual edifices or theoretical bridges with competing viewpoints.<sup>1</sup> Stirner and his intellectual progeny were after a type of personal and social transformation, but the purposes underlying the writings of these egoists, not surprisingly, are highly idiosyncratic. The dialectical egoist writers did

not intend to create a mass movement based on Stirner's work. They simply enjoyed the act of articulating a heterodoxical perspective on society, individuality, and nature. Other persons were not discouraged from coming along, but they were not especially encouraged, either. Dialectical egoism is unlikely to attract adherents in academia or in popular culture in the same way that grand theories have in disciplines like sociology, political science, and economics.

It is possible to extract the basic theoretical ideas from the writings of Stirner, Tucker, Walker, and Marsden to comprise a theoretical perspective called "dialectical egoism." The chapter breaks rank with other analyses of Stirner that argue that his thought is too personal and idiosyncratic to constitute a theoretical framework that is helpful in understanding modernity. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate that Stirner's thought is rooted in the many issues that concerned Hegel and the Young Hegelians. Chapters 4 through 7 demonstrate that there were certainly differences, but also many commonalities in the writings of Stirner, Tucker, Walker, and Marsden can that be used to understand a variety of individual, social, and historical phenomena. Dialectical egoism can never be the same sort of theoretical and social movement as Marxism, functionalism, or postmodernism. Nor can it ever offer the same sort of grand theorizing, system building, or hypothesis testing as these other perspectives. Nevertheless, the egoist thought of Stirner and his intellectual progeny has the basic elements of a theoretical framework that comprises a distinct analysis of modernity, including:

1. A concept that situates the person, or unique ego, in a sociocultural context, that includes the internal and external challenges confronting an individual's assertion of ownness;
2. Five basic methodological precepts that orient the analysis of Stirner and his intellectual progeny; and
3. An approach to political and cultural criticism that employs the use of both immanent and transcendental critique.

### **THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In contemporary political and social theory, dialectical methods are almost universally associated with Marxism and Critical Theory with their emphases on class struggle, historical determinism, and the conquest of state power by a political elite. The received wisdom is that the genius of Marx and Engels superseded all previous conceptions of the dialectic and imprisoned it within the fortified boundaries of Marxist thought. However, it is a gross distortion to reduce the full range of dialectical inquiry

to Marxism and its variants. The dialectic potentially informs many theoretical perspectives, including egoism and individualism. Dialectical egoism is especially interested in (a) the use of the dialectic as the primary methodological tool, stripped of its Marxist and Hegelian constraints; (b) a critique of the state as an obstacle to individual freedom; (c) a concept of oneness and self-ownership as the political, cultural, and economic goal of inquiry; and (d) the notion that the individual constitutes a totality, or the irreducible unit, that potentially confronts organizations and others intending to appropriate his or her power and property. Dialectical analysis transcends antagonisms between specific social classes, and can be applied more broadly to include conflicts between the market and the state, cultural ideals and social practices, and self and other. Dialectical analysis includes a conviction that there is no *terminus* to the historical process, that social reality is multidimensional, and that humans do not know all there is to know. Dialectical methods aim at the demolition of externally imposed constraints on individual action and thought, which Hegel encapsulated in his notion of the "free subject."

Stirner was the only student of Hegel who articulated a philosophy that was both antistatist and anticollectivist, with the possible exception of Karl Schmidt. However, "freedom" and "liberty" are important concepts throughout the entirety of Hegel's philosophy. The young Hegel was vehemently antistatist and commented early in his career that "the state must be abolished" because it inevitably treats persons as though they are cogs in a machine, regardless of the form it takes in any particular historical context. Hegel correctly assessed early in his career that the state was anathema to the "free subject." While his view of the state changed, Hegel's dialectic purports to discover the process in which freedom is made actual in the world. In *The Science of Logic*, Hegel refers to the dialectic as the "self-bringing forth of liberty." He also states that "[o]nly that which is an object of freedom may be called an Idea," which means that the standard for assessing the validity of knowledge is not its correspondence to an inert "out there," but its contribution to human freedom and individual liberty.<sup>2</sup> It is pertinent that the young Marx, having discovered the problem of alienation in the Hegelian dialectic, stated that "the individual is the social entity," which hardly prefigures his so-called mature and collectivist position that social classes are the primary social actors. Marx abandoned a critical facet of the Hegelian dialectic, when he decided to view human liberation in terms of collectivities.

Dialectical social theory should be freed from the Marxian shackles that are used to understand it. The prevailing collectivist and statist interpretation of dialectics reflects little more than the power that socialist and humanist ideology wield today in shaping the limits of knowledge and constraining individuality and alternative social formations. Dialectical



egoism is a theoretical framework that is interested in how dialectical thought can help foster and promote egoist, individualist, and antistatist ideas. It therefore challenges the domination of contemporary political thought by collectivist and statist concepts and goals. The intent is not simply to reveal the dialectical foundations of thought and society. It is to articulate dialectical egoism as an integrated political philosophy that is distinct from other political perspectives, but every bit as comprehensive in its depiction of the problems of political legitimacy and human development. In the case of Stirner, the argument for a dialectical egoist framework becomes clear as long as Stirner's thought is not understood as merely "anti-Hegelian." "Dialectical egoism" is an appropriate moniker for Stirner's thought. Its Hegelian moorings were demonstrated in chapters 1–3 and its thoroughgoing egoism signals both a relationship with, and a departure from, other expressions of individualist and libertarian thought. Dialectical egoism is a specific form of individualism and anti-statism defined by Max Stirner and his intellectual progeny.

Dialectical theory is strong in its interpretation of conflict, alienation, and the struggle for freedom, even though some its adherents promote political domination. Egoist theory is strong in its defense of individuality and challenge to authority and political domination, even though some of its contemporary proponents are uncritical of capitalism. Both egoism and dialectical analysis purport to be philosophies of freedom. Both assign liberty and the self a central role in philosophy and politics. An optimal outcome of a conversation between dialectical analysis and egoism on modernity is a vision of individuality and society freed of domination and the collectivist reduction of persons to abstract political and social categories. The dialectical egoist vision of the individual's relationship to society, culture, and polity bears a significant resemblance to Hegel's concept of the "free subject" and Stirner's concept of the "unique one." Both concepts describe the self-conscious, self-determining individual. The anti-utopianism of Hegel and Stirner are based on an objection to the imposition of a rationally concocted plan on individuals and society by political or cultural elites.

### **Individuals and Social Organization**

Stirner understood the egoistic philosophy he worked out in *The Ego and Its Own* as a critique of modernity and as a continuation and fulfillment of the Hegelian dialectic. Consequently, dialectical egoism offers the best opportunity for an improved interpretation of Stirner and the articulation of a social theory that envisions individuality and society freed of domination by modernist ideology and the social system it legitimates. Dialectical egoism offers a theoretical framework that includes a trilevel model

of the interaction between individuals and social organization. It opposes the isolation and abstraction of one level from the others and emphasizes the impact of each level on the others. The three levels include the (a) the thought and action of individuals as expressed in everyday life, (b) the role of culture and ideology in shaping individual thought and action, as well as resistance to culture and ideology, and (c) the macrolevel political and economic structures, including the forms and uses of institutionalized coercion and the control of property.<sup>3</sup>

At the base of Stirner's model of the relationship of persons to social organization is the perspective of the everyday experience, the cognition and behaviors of the individual. It is the individual's perspective on his or her everyday experiences, including the sense of ownership or alienness of one's thoughts and action. The focus is on the importance of individual and interpersonal thought and behavior that promote or challenge modernity and alternatives to it. It attempts to capture how the person navigates everyday life in the modern period.

Stirner's concepts of ownness and the unique one are the most significant concepts of dialectical egoism for this level of analysis. Stirner's work was oriented toward an understanding of how persons could protect their autonomy and dignity, acquire power and property, and enjoy self by confronting humanist ideology and the social system that supports it. Neither Stirner nor his intellectual progeny offered a recipe for thinking or behaving within varying social contexts. What mattered to the dialectical egoists was the person's ownership of mind, self, and body so that they can freely choose their thoughts and behaviors. Dialectical egoism is the theory and practice of individual opposition to preexisting formulae for thought and behavior whether these come from the state, the church, or the school. There are no extant, external measures that provide the person with definitive guidance about thinking and acting. What matters is the individual's assertion of ownership of their thoughts and actions, which requires the negation of alien and external ideas. Tucker, Walker, and Marsden each contributed to Stirner's egoism through their articulation of the antagonism of the unique individual to "moralism" or the imposition of an external morality on the thoughts of persons. Tucker objected to the imposition of morality on individuals, whether it originated through the state or through less institutional mechanisms in society. Walker's egoist thought is particularly helpful by differentiating the thought and action of individuals, and those of "composite individualities," or social institutions and large-scale organizations. Marsden used concepts such as "the lean kind," "embargoism," and "ragamuffinism" to identify the situations in which persons are deprived of their self-ownership. Stirner used the concept of the ragamuffin as the archetype that negates the unique one.

Stirner's dialectical egoism entails a forceful analysis and critique of modernity at the personal level. In Stirner's formulation, "nothing is more to me than myself." Dialectical egoism attacks every cultural construct and social fact that has an external existence and coercive impact on the person. Dialectical egoism interprets all political, cultural, and ethical codes as antithetical to the self-ownership of the individual. Individuals in this theory do not act morally or immorally, rationally or irrationally, legitimately or illegitimately. Morality, rationality, and legitimacy are all external concepts that function as forms of ideological social control. Persons simply act. What matters to dialectical egoism is not whether the individual is ethical or rational, but whether the individual is sovereign, whether the individual "owns" the act. The free subject in Stirner's view is the unique one, the sovereign individual who is not constrained by natural law, political authority, cultural norms, religion, or fictitious moral codes. Dialectical egoism deconstructs concepts such as god, humanity, morality, and authority into specters or spooks created and imposed by others. All such fictions dissolve into the unique one who reconstructs everyday life through willed or intentional relationships with other individuals. The unique one is the implacable enemy of all ideas that seek to impose external meanings and behavioral patterns. Modernity is the theory and practice of the systematic dispossession of power and property from individuals. It is a sociohistorical formation that reduces persons to ragamuffins. Dialectical egoism is its opposite: the theory and practice of resistance to ragamuffinism.

At the midlevel of Stirner's analysis is a focus on the elements of culture and ideology that promote, perpetuate, or challenge the structure of social relations in the modern period. In many important respects, this level is the primary animus of dialectical egoism. Stirner, Tucker, Walker, and Marsden each articulated a critique on the culture and ideology of modernity. Stirner, particularly, attacked social liberalism and humane liberalism in all of its various expressions, while Tucker, Walker, and Marsden tended to direct their critiques toward morality and specific political ideologies, such as capitalism and socialism. Each of the four thinkers also examined the interaction between the person and culture to understand how social systems are able to cultivate compliance and subordination to authority. Stirner and Marsden developed the notion of the "ragamuffin" as the archetype individual who cheerfully surrenders ownership, or accepts dispossession as appropriate and just in response to cultural demands that individuals think of themselves as components or parts of a collectivity. The ragamuffin is not only forcibly dispossessed of power and property, but gleefully abandons the boundary between self and culture, uncritically adopting prevailing values and meanings as his or her own.

Stirner's critique of culture and ideology in *The Ego and Its Own* is grounded in his notion of the *idée fixe*, the fixed idea. Dialectical egoists are primarily concerned with the power that abstractions acquire in the social process, particularly when they became tools of the church, state, or other institutional authorities. Stirner vehemently objects to the philosophic promulgation of abstract terms such as "humanity," "nation," "class," and "race" as though these are real actors in sociohistorical dramas. For Stirner, these concepts are reifications, alienated thoughts, used by the state and its functionaries in academia and the church to browbeat individuals into submission to the goals and values of external "causes." Fixed ideas are little more than anthropomorphisms that structure thought and behavior in the direction of essences and abstractions. They are spooks that Stirner and his colleagues challenged at the psychological, cultural, and political levels.

At the most macrolevel Stirner's model of the relationship between the individual and social organization is viewed from the perspective of political and economic structures, processes, and institutions. At this level, the focus is on the mechanisms of institutionalized coercion that impose a structure of power in and control of resources.

Benjamin Tucker directed much of his theoretical work at this level of organization through his critique of the emergence and development of monopoly capitalism. Tucker recognized that a new form of capitalism had developed—a fusion of political and economic power that institutionalized class inequalities. The monopoly form of capitalism posed newer challenges to the egoists and individualist anarchists who believed that freedom is dependent upon the individual's ownership and control of the means to their survival. Monopoly capitalism was comprised of four monopolies—banking, land, trade, and intellectual property. The rise of monopoly capitalism ensured the fusion of the state and the economy. It was rooted in the contradictions of political, social, and humane liberalism, but it was a new form of political economy. Stirner already attacked the contradictions of "free competition" by observing that the liberal, absolute state sets the parameters on competition, determined who could compete, and identified the legitimacy of exchange and the ownership of property. Free competition was not really free. Instead, it was a transitional political-economic form that had a tendency toward monopoly, particularly as political liberalism was superseded by social and humane liberalism. Tucker articulated the "totalized" form of monopoly capitalism. Stirner, Tucker, Walker, and Marsden realized that monopoly capitalism could not be effectively challenged by the form of monopoly proposed by socialists, communists, and humanists, where all human activity occurs is subordinate to the state and the collective. The various collectivist responses are only alternative forms of monopoly. They represent the consummate fusion of the

state and the economy. Since Stirner's original articulation of the fusion of state and economy, more destructive forms of this fusion of the political and the economic have emerged: Soviet Communism, Nazism, Corporate Statism, and Islamo-Fascism. Stirner should be credited with being one of the first critics to recognize that the European and American social systems did not operate as described by the classical political economists.

Stirner's dialectical egoist critique entails the notion that modernity, the "dominion of mind," is a sociohistorical form comprised of personal, cultural, and political economic dynamics. Ownness and individual freedom are dependent upon the person's challenge to control at each level. Stirner was very critical of capitalism, particularly the legal obstacles to "free competition." He rejected natural law and natural right as the source of individual freedom. The appeal to natural law and natural right mystified the fact that individual rights must be asserted; rights are nothing without the power to impose them on others. The unique ego, the concrete assertion of right, is the enemy of the state. Individuals who own their minds, selves, and bodies can never be the compliant subjects that governments attempt to cultivate. Marsden recognized that the antagonism between the individual and the state was absolute and that it could never be resolved; the individual would forever confront institutionalized political authority as an enemy that seeks his or her dispossession of power, property, and self-enjoyment. Walker and Tucker responded to the antagonism through the promotion of anarchism as a theoretical and practical movement to eliminate the state. Both envisioned a future in which people would be able to create social structures based on voluntary contract, not force nor implied contracts. Both were considerably more optimistic about the elimination of government in society than either Stirner or Marsden, who viewed the unique one as permanently opposed to the state and all collectivities, except perhaps those that are directly chosen by persons. Neither Stirner nor Marsden made anarchism a central category in their thought; both expressed a conviction that society cannot be reconstructed at the macrolevel without reconstituting political authority in another form, thus generating new forms of opposition.

Stirner's statement of uncompromising egoism is not anarchism, but it is a type of antistatism that rejects all political systems because they necessarily entail the imposition of political authority in some form. All political systems require some limitation on the self-ownership of the individual. Self-ownership or ownness means that the person can freely pursue activities and relationships unimpeded by the state or any other collective formation. Stirner argues for the reconstruction of self through the unique one and the reconstruction of society through the union of egoists, the freely chosen relationships formed by individuals who own their thoughts and actions. The dialectical egoist opposition to modernity is a reflection of the

individual's resistance to political authority in any form and a rejection of political and economic processes that place individuals into categories against their will. The reduction of persons to collective identities, whether it follows from political, social, or humane liberalism, is domination and control. It has no legitimacy for the dialectical egoist. The unity of Stirner's egoist framework can be expressed in shorthand by referencing the concept of ownness, which implies a mutual dependence and reinforcement of intellectual, moral, and political freedom, an appropriation of mind and self by the person. Resistance to modernity means insurrection against ragamuffinhood, humanist ideology, and monopoly capitalism.

### **Five Methodological Precepts**

The second important element of the dialectical egoist critique of modernity is a set of five methodological principles that can be identified in the writings of Stirner, Tucker, Walker, and Marsden. The basic methodological ideas of a dialectical egoist approach to the critique of modernity include:

#### *1. The individual is the totality.*

While the analysis of the individual's relationship to culture and society includes each of the three levels, these are not equal in importance from an advocacy point of view. For the dialectical egoist, the individual is the totality, not culture and not the state. Culture and politics constitute the context in which the individual lives, thinks, and acts. Ultimately, culture and political life are created, maintained, and transformed by individuals acting and interacting. The thinking and acting subject is the foundation of any reality that humans create, modify, and experience. From a dialectical egoist point of view, all social constructions, such as culture and the state, exist because of the activity of individuals or groups. What separates dialectical egoism from other forms of political thought is the precept that ownness is what drives the behavior of persons. It is also the goal or telos of inquiry. Ownness is the concept that describes the individual's appropriation of social constructions as his or her own, serving purposes assigned by the individual. It is the activity of the unique one to overcome alienation. The union of egoists is Stirner's view of the reconstruction of social life in a "dis-alienated" and "de-reified" form. It is not an end in itself, but a tool for individuals to achieve their own ends.

#### *2. Conflict is inherent in the everyday experience of persons.*

Dialectical egoism is a study of the conflicts and antagonisms in thought and social practice generated and experienced by individuals. Prevailing

social theories, political ideologies, and social structures are replete with tensions. From a dialectical egoist point of view, paramount among these are (a) the conflict between the power of the state and the liberty of the individual; (b) the conflict between the prevailing abstractions, values, and meanings in culture and the person's struggle to define reality for self; and (c) conflict among persons and groups for desiderata.

Physical coercion and ideological control are dynamics that confront the person on an ongoing basis. Persons are born into a society that intends to impose its physical and mental dominion. Individuals, particularly, tend to resist constraints on their behavior and to assert oneness. Egoistic challenges to institutionalized force and fraud typify life. There is no escape from these conflict. As Stirner pointed out, some matters must be settled in the war of each against all. As Marsden argued, conflict is necessary, important, and valuable because it puts the zest in life.

### 3. *Life is processual.*

Much of Stirner's objection to modernity is based on the notion that reality cannot be fixed or finalized, even though individuals and groups attempt to "fix" ideas. Modernity is the "dominion of mind" which attempts to subordinate life to thought, or to substitute individual experience for fixed ideas. Historically, each new "higher presupposition" viewed itself as the *terminus* to history. This tendency is an illusion based on the assumption that new conflicts and challenges will not emerge. Human experience must be understood as a process.

Stirner understood that both history and everyday life are processes in which culture and society change. The major historical change Stirner analyzed was the broad transformation from antiquity to modernity. He also examined the transformations that took place within modernity, most notably the emergence of the three forms of liberalism. No form of society or interaction is permanent. Society and culture are not fixed; they are in flux, constantly challenged and potentially changing. Even unions of egoists arise, change, and dissipate. Thus, any form of inquiry informed by Stirner and his progeny is not particularly concerned with the discovery of eternal laws and universal order in human existence. Instead, it is the search for the sources of, and obstacles to, oneness.

### 4. *The behavior of persons is indeterminate.*

A dialectical egoist analysis of theory and society is also committed to a philosophy of knowledge that disputes the idea that human experience can or must be understood according to the assumptions and procedures to the natural sciences. Dialectical egoism differs from other many other perspec-

tives by not only allowing for indeterminacy in history and freedom in human behavior, but by making these the goal of inquiry and action. Dialectical egoism rejects the view that persons are the eternal victims of sociohistorical forces they cannot surmount. Persons have the ability to reason, to choose their own behavior, and to act on the basis of their convictions. The behavior of individuals cannot be reduced to the behavior of natural phenomena. Scientism is the ideological effort to interpret the thought and action of individuals using mechanistic or natural science models. Stirner recognized that persons interact with each other and learn from each other. He recognized that they attempt to coerce each other. But he repeatedly rejected implications that their behavior is determined by society, culture, or biology. Dialectical egoism stands in opposition to determinism of any type.

##### *5. Inquiry appropriates and challenges the world.*

The dialectical egoist analysis of individuality, theory, and society is committed to the notion that there is an inextricable relationship between the observer and the object under study. The important epistemological assumption is that scholars and intellectuals cannot be extricated from the objects they seek to understand or change. They cannot adopt an external relationship to the objects they study. There is no dualism or separation between scholarship and the world it studies. Stirner, the student of Hegel, understood actuality as the nexus between the objective and the subjective, the in-itself and the for-itself. He ridiculed Descartes, Kant, and empiricism for building conceptual barriers between the subject and the object. The study of an object is an act of egoism. It is a self-interested effort to understand oneself, to appropriate the object, and to expand one's power, property, and self-enjoyment. The dialectical egoist analysis of modernity is an effort to confront and challenge the fixed ideas and social structures that define it.

These methodological precepts suggest that there are common elements in the approaches that Stirner, Tucker, Walker, and Marsden used to understand individuality, history, and society. They are principles that are helpful in understanding Stirner's critique of modernity. An egoist critique of modernity includes elements of dialectical methods in order to ensure that the understanding of these processes is grounded in the realities of human thought and action. It also includes the idea that egoist inquiry resists the practice of subordinating individuals to authority and their identities to abstract social and political categories.

### **Dialectical Egoism: Two Forms of Critique**

The third element of a dialectical egoist approach to the study of modernity is the recognition that Stirner and his progeny were primarily inter-



ested in advancing critiques of morality, culture, and politics. They adopted two discernible forms of critique: immanent and transcendental. Immanent and transcendental critique attempt to identify the conflicts and contradictions between thought and reality, theory and practice, the in-itself and the for-itself. Both are methods of subverting authoritarian and collectivist social formations, as well as the legitimations that help prop them up. The estrangement of thought from reality is a ubiquitous interest in dialectical analysis. In egoist analysis, the interest in alienation tends to be focused on the negation of individual liberty in either social thought or social practice. Dialectical egoist thought proceeds from the standpoint of both immanent and transcendental critique.

Much of radical social thought is a form of immanent critique, ultimately derived from Hegel's attack on Kant's separation of thought from the object of cognition. *Immanent* critique is arguably the core of dialectical analysis. It has been used by a variety of theorists, including Hegel, Marx, and Stirner. It is a form of dialectical analysis focused on the contradictions that arise from social facts. It requires the analyst to first understand how a social system defines or understands itself. It then compares and contrasts this presentation of self with the realities of the social system. Immanent critique is ultimately concerned with the extent to which there is a match or mismatch between what a social system says about itself and how it actually operates. Phenomenal appearances, or ideological claims, about a social formation often mystify the thing-in-itself. With immanent critique, the false correspondence of the ideal and the real is elaborated a method of social analysis, but it has an historical or a political meaning as well: to make the ideal a reality, or to eliminate the false correspondence between societal goals and societal realities. "Immanent critique attacks social reality from its own standpoint, but at the same time criticizes the standpoint from the perspective of historical context."<sup>4</sup> Immanent critique proceeds by contrasting the phenomenal appearance of a social formation with the in-itself reality. It is further elaborated by the writer or scholar by turning the ideological claim into a tool to transform the in-itself reality, to make the fact fit the claim.

Stirner used immanent critique frequently. His analyses of the contradictions of free competition and freedom of the press are probably the best examples of his use of immanent critique, although it also appears in his analyses of rights and liberalism. As far as Stirner was concerned, capitalism was a flawed economic system because the phenomenal appearance as a system of "free enterprise" or "free competition" was contradicted by the "in-itself" fact that it operated freely only to the extent that the state allowed. Competition or trade is not really free as long as the state has the power and authority to determine who can compete and under what conditions competition can occur. It is not really free as long

as the state can determine what can be exchanged and under what conditions exchanges can occur. Stirner's goal was to unmask the false appearance, challenging state intervention. A similar problem appears with "freedom of the press." He reasoned that the press is not really free as long as it is the state that defines what freedom is, and as long as the state has the power and authority to determine what can and cannot be printed. Neither an economy nor a press can be free if rights are conferred by the state. Stirner argues that if the economy and the press were really free, any role of the state in the economy or the press would be irrelevant. As Stirner's own experience in nineteenth-century Prussia demonstrated, the freedoms of the press existed at the caprice of the state. In Stirner's view, a free press is a press that operates external to the state, or regardless of the state. Advocacy for economic freedom and for freedom of the press must also be advocacy for social space that is free of the power of the state. Stirner was ruthless and unrelenting in his critique of modernity and the constructions of humanity, God, and history prevailing in his time. His critique of ideology consistently reveals the human and social base of master concepts, such as humanity.

*Transcendental* critique is also concerned with contractions and antagonisms in thought and practice, but it proceeds differently from immanent critique. This approach proceeds by the theorist first articulating values, principles, or standards that guide the analysis, and then contrasting these with the practice or realities of a social formation. In this case, the standards are those articulated by the theorists, not by the social formation. Transcendental critique is something of a departure from the immanent critique. Many political theorists use transcendental critique. Hegel's philosophy pointed toward the Absolute Idea, which turned out to be the dialectical method. Marx's historical materialism was directed toward the concept of "praxis" as the absolute standard of a fully human existence.

The political purpose of transcendental critique is also to promote a closer match between thought and existing social practice. As the facts of a particular sociohistorical formation depart from the qualities of transcendental concepts, these thinkers believed they had a basis for a critique of theory and society. For Stirner, the matter is somewhat different, but he, too, identified transcendental standards for assessing the extent to which individuals are unique, or the extent to which they "own" their lives and behaviors. Stirner's three major ideas—ownness, the unique one, and the union of egoists—are all examples of transcendental concepts or standards. Unlike notions of "free competition" and "freedom of the press" they did not emerge from social practice, but were developed by Stirner himself and used by him and his colleagues to assess social and historical realities. Moreover, each of the three concepts could be applied to a variety of sociohistorical environments. They have a something of a "tran-

scendental" quality to them since they are standards to be used in a critique of antiquity as well as modernity.

Stirner's notions of ownness, the unique ego, and the union of egoists are as close as dialectical egoism can get to a transcendental critique. Stirner's critics argue that he was inconsistent in his treatment of the unique one and the union of egoists as transcendental concepts since his whole philosophy is built on an opposition to behavioral ideals of any sort. Stirner responded to these critics, as discussed in chapter 1, by pointing out that he never stated or implied any specific content in the thought or action of the unique one or the union of egoists. That is to be worked out by individuals. Egoists, unique ones, are characterized by the struggle for "ownness" in the individual's relationship with self and the individual's relationship with others. Stirner argued that this is a marked contrast to the transcendental concepts in other political theories.

### STIRNER AND THE PROBLEMS OF MODERNITY

As these three elements indicate, dialectical egoism can be employed to analyze a wide range of social, cultural, and social-psychological phenomena. Dialectical egoism potentially informs studies of politics, economics, theory, race, gender, and sexuality, contributing to the knowledge base in these fields. This study is modest in scope because it is interested the basic theoretical elements of dialectical egoism. The three elements of dialectical egoism are drawn from the writings of Stirner and his progeny, but they can also serve as a framework for other inquiry into egoistic responses to the ideology and social relations of modernity.

Arguably Stirner's most important contribution in the history of ideas is his unique description of modernity and the problems it poses to individuals and social relations. It is distinct from Marxism, postmodernism, conservatism, and neoliberalism which variously define the problem of modernity as how to respond to one or a combination of challenges that include: (a) reconciling individual freedom and community as an increasingly complex amalgam of social institutions continues to proliferate; (b) overcoming the exploitation of one social category by another in an environment that is increasingly sophisticated in applying the technologies of social control; (c) recapturing a sense of meaning and fulfillment in the midst of mass disillusionment with contemporary culture and politics; and (d) balancing individual freedom and political authority in an historical period characterized by a predatory state and a culture oriented toward the absolute collectivization of social problems.<sup>5</sup>

For Stirner and his progeny, the primary problem of modernity is the "dominion of mind," or the domination of thought and action by the ab-

stract and collective categories of "humanism." Dialectical egoism appropriately stands in opposition to the major theoretical perspectives on modernity by adamantly opposing humanism as an analytical concept and political good. The most important lesson Stirner teaches is that as long as "humanity" or any other collective construct functions as a hegemonic image, neither god nor liberalism nor ideology are dead. Dialectical egoism intends to contribute to the efforts by individuals to liberate themselves, to assert ownership over their lives, thoughts, and actions. In "modern times," its attack is directed against humanity as the "supreme being" and the reduction of persons to ragamuffins. Despite its many problems and shortcomings, dialectical egoism offers a radically different path to pursue individual freedom from those that have been sanctioned in the modern world. Its opposition to the dispossession of the power and property of persons makes it worthy of serious study and discussion, especially in an historical period in which individuals are confronted by predatory governments and corporations.

## NOTES

1. Walker and Tucker differed from Stirner and Marsden in their advocacy of anarchism. However, neither Walker nor Tucker envisioned any mass movement or grand theoretical scheme to advance their ideas, although Tucker was a strong supporter of labor.

2. See G. W. F. Hegel, "The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism," in *The Hegel Reader* (1796 or 1797; repr., Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 28. It turns out that even in the mature system of Hegel, the dialectic proves itself as the only absolute. Its telos is self-conscious self-determination, the content of freedom. See the *Science of Logic* (1816; repr., Amherst, MA: Humanity Press, 1969), 824–44.

3. I am indebted to the scholarship of Chris Matthew Sciabarra for help with conceptualizing a multilevel framework for understanding the relationship of the individual to culture and social organization. Sciabarra developed his framework out of studies of Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard in *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) and *Total Freedom: Toward a Dialectical Libertarianism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). Sciabarra's work is also valuable because it, too, demonstrates that dialectic can be applied to more individualistic political positions.

4. Robert J. Antonio, "Immanent Critique as the Core of Critical Theory: Its Origins and Development in Hegel, Marx, and Contemporary Thought," *British Journal of Sociology* 32 (1981): 330–45. Also see John F. Welsh, *After Multiculturalism: The Politics of Race and the Dialectics of Liberty* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 194–200, for a discussion about immanent and transcendental critique.

5. Pauline Rosenau, *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 138–66.



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